

# CHoW Line

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C.

February 2010

Volume XIV, Number 5



## *Evolution of the Romantic Heart Shape and Flavors of Valentine Confections*

**Speaker: Nancy Baggett**

**Sunday, February 14, 2010  
2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.**

Cookbook author and food journalist **Nancy Baggett** has written 10 cookbooks and is a long-time contributor for *Eating Well* magazine and *The Washington Post* food section. Her *International Chocolate Cookbook* was selected 1992's best dessert book by the International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP). Nancy's most recent book, *Kneadlessly Simple – Fabulous, Fuss-Free No-Knead Breads*, has won praise from both buyers and reviewers.

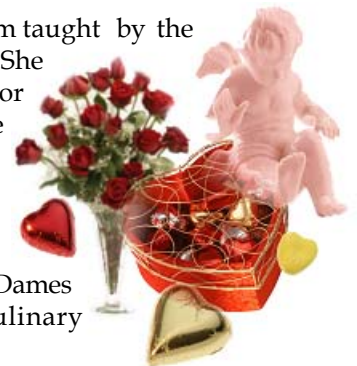
More than 100,000 copies of her very popular *The All-American Cookie Book* are in print, and the book was nominated for a 2001 Best Baking Book Award by both IACP and the James Beard Foundation.

Known for both lively writing and ultra-reliable recipes, Nancy has contributed to many major magazines and newspapers, including *Food & Wine*, *Bon Appetit*, *The Ladies' Home Journal*, *Woman's Day*, *House Beautiful*, *Chocolatier*, *Cooking Light*, and *The Los Angeles Times*.

The renowned author is a frequent television and radio guest chef and has appeared on "Good Morning America," "CBS This Morning," CNN, the TV Food Network, the Discovery Channel, Lifetime Television, and scores of other national and local shows. She is also an occasionally culinary commentator for National Public Radio's "All Things Considered – Weekend Edition."

Nancy spent a year in a professional pastry chef program taught by the White House Executive Pastry Chef, Roland Mesnier. She presents workshops, classes, talks and demonstrations for organizations including the Smithsonian Institution, the International Association of Culinary Professionals, the Home Baking Association, and at many events around the country.

Nancy is a member of the Washington, DC Chapter of Les Dames d'Escoffier and the International Association of Culinary Professionals. She resides in Ellicott City, Maryland.



### CALENDAR CHoW Meetings

#### March 4

**Special Tour:** Library of Congress's rare book holdings on gastronomy by Mark Dimunation, Chief. Thursday, 4:00 p.m.

#### March 14

Fred Czarra, "Spices of Life: The Savory Story of the First Global Marketplace"

#### April 11

Cooperative Supper (Note: time change 4 to 6 p.m.)

#### May 2

Barbara G. Carson, "Ambitious Appetites" – political aspects on dining in D.C. during the Federal period. (Note: first Sunday)

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C. (CHoW/DC)

founded in 1996, is an informal, nonprofit, educational organization dedicated to the study of the history of foodstuffs, cuisines, and culinary customs, both historical and contemporary, from all parts of the world.

[www.chowdc.org](http://www.chowdc.org)

# What Happened at the December 13 Meeting?

## GENERAL MEETING MINUTES

The Meeting was called to order by **Katherine Livingston**, CHoW President, at 2:50 p.m. There were 43 members and guests in attendance.

**Whatzits:** **Zina Pisarko** shared a long thin grain stock which several attendees announced correctly that it was a broom straw used for testing baked goods.

### Refreshments:

**Sue Latini** brought *Khanom Mo Kaeng Pheuk* (Taro Coconut Custard) and *Man Cheuam* (Candied Sweet Potato)

**Claudia Kousoulas** brought Sugar Cookies frosted in a lotus design from Sarah Levy's *Sweetness: Delicious Baked Treats for Every Occasion* (Agate Press, 2009)

**Zina Pisarko** brought *Ma Proaw Gaw* (without, according to Zina, the optimal flavoring of *Nam nommao*) from *Thai Home-Cooking* by William Crawford and Kamolmal Pootaraksa (New American Library, 1985)

**Amy Riolo** brought Turkish Cyprus Delight

**Amy Snyder** brought Thai Lime & Chili Cashews

**Kathleen Carrington** brought Asian Cocktail Franks

**Clara Raju** brought Homemade Marshmallows

**Katherine Livingston** brought Blue Cheese Stars from the *Washington Post*

**Program:** Prior to introducing today's speaker, CiCi Williamson, CHoW Vice-President, gave an overview of the programs for the remainder of the year. She then introduced today's speaker, Nongkran Daks, who spoke on "Beyond Curry and Pad Thai: Regional Thai Cuisine." Her presentation highlighted the different foods and dishes found throughout her homeland, some of which she serves in her restaurant in Chantilly, VA.

Meeting was adjourned by President Livingston at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by **David Bender**,  
Recording Secretary

## "Beyond Curry & Pad Thai: Regional Thai Cuisine" -- Nongkran Daks

By CiCi Williamson

"Adopt and adapt," are the words Nongkran Daks used to summarize the emergence of regional Thai cuisine. The food of southern Thailand has been influenced by Malaysian, Arabic, and Pakistani cuisine, while the northern region – that of the one million rice fields – leans towards China, its near neighbor across the Burma-Laotian panhandles.



L to R: Jack Warner, Nongkran Daks, Kathleen Carrington, Royle Carrington, and Debby Warner.

In a "richer for poorer" contrast, Nong told us that central Thailand, which husbands the capital of Bangkok, has more refined palace foods, while northeastern Thailand is the poorest part of the country and borders totally with Laos on its east side.

Our speaker was born in southern Thailand and began cooking at age seven. Before opening Thai Basil Restaurant in Chantilly, Virginia, ([www.thaibasilchantilly.com](http://www.thaibasilchantilly.com)) she had taught cooking and catered in Honolulu as her residence followed the career of

husband Larry whom she met when he served in the Peace Corps and subsequently became a member of the diplomatic ranks.

Aiming for maximum authenticity in her restaurant dishes, Nongkran has studied regional Thai cuisine. At the CHoW meeting, she showed photos illustrative of regional dishes and the ingredients used to prepare them. Below is a *mélange* of ingredients and dishes of each region.

**Northern Thailand.** Rice, sticky rice in balls, Hunan-style Chinese food, fried pork rinds, bamboo worms, silk worms, hog blood, bamboo shoots, *lumyai longan* and *lychee*. *Khantoke*, *Nam Prik Ong*, *Gang Haeng Lay*.

**Northeastern Thailand.** Glutinous or sticky rice, papaya, Crying Tiger (*Sya Rong Hai*), *Laab*, *Somtam Kaiyang Khaoniaow*.

**Central Thailand.** Bite-sized food, palace food, Pad Thai, noodles (brought from China in the 17 th century), coconut sugar cooked with tamarind to make the original Thai sauce.

**Southern Thailand.** Crabs (male has a "Washington Monument" marking and female, a Capitol marking), red snapper, white fish, small tuna, lobster, shallots but not onions (very expensive), Massaman Curry (one of the few dishes using potatoes that are imported from India and expensive), turmeric, calamari stuffed with pork, crispy pork or duck, pork satay, fried rice, banana leaves wrapped around fish, pomelo, mangosteen, Kaffir lime, noina (custard apple), jackfruit, pineapple, rambutan, sataw, and cilantro and "mouse droppings" chili peppers (brought by Portuguese).

# Upcoming Events

## Chinese New Year and Valentine's Day

Both are on **February 14** this year. Wear **RED!**

Come to CHoW's meeting featuring Nancy Baggett speaking about the "Evolution of the Romantic Heart Shape and Flavors of Valentine Confections."

## ImaginAsia: Heart-to-Heart

**Saturday, February 6 or Saturday, February 13, 1 - 3 p.m.**

Open house for all ages. While listening to traditional love songs from Asia, create origami hearts to give to family and special friends on Valentine's Day.

Freer Gallery of Art, Jefferson Drive at 12th Street  
Washington, D.C. 20013, 202-633-1000

## Celebrating FOOD!

### Cooking ~ Careers ~ Communications

Les Dames d'Escoffier's  
Seventh Salute to Women in Gastronomy

**DATE:** Saturday, February 27, 2010  
**TIME:** 9:00 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.  
**PLACE:** University of Maryland at Shady Grove,  
Rockville, Maryland  
**COST:** \$95 including Continental breakfast & lunch

#### A full-day seminar Featuring:

*Hands-on Cooking Lessons in pastry, pickling, flatbreads and sushi.*  
A Fabulous Food EXPO with new products and samples.  
Festival of Desserts. Rosé wine and chocolate finale.

#### **More than 50 Featured Speakers including:**

Carla Hall, Bravo-TV "Top Chef" Finalist  
Nongkran Daks, TV Food Network Star  
Joe Yonan, Food Editor, *The Washington Post*  
Aliza Green, Award-winning author

David Leite, author of *The New Portuguese Table*

**CHoW members speaking:** Amy Riolo, Sheilah Kaufman,  
Patrick Evans-Hylton, Catherine Pressler,  
and CiCi Williamson.

To download a brochure and register, go to  
[www.lesdamesdc.org](http://www.lesdamesdc.org).

## 16th Annual Environmental Film Fest

**March 16-28.** There are many films that would be of interest to CHoW members. We are alerting you a month ahead of time because tickets often sell out early. A few titles are: *Terra Madre*, *DIRT! The Movie*, *Fish and Cow*, *HomeGrown*, *FRESH*, and *What's On Your Plate?* The films are shown in a wide variety of venues around Washington, D.C. [www.dcenvironmentalfilmfest.org/](http://www.dcenvironmentalfilmfest.org/)

## News From Other Organizations

**New York University's** Fales Library obtained *Gourmet* magazine's collection of 3,500 reference books. Author Rozanne Gold donated \$14,000 to buy the collection after Conde Nast ceased publication in October of the periodical that had been published for 75 years. <http://tinyurl.com/ydff9ef> and also <http://dinersjournal.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/12/15/nyu-gets-gourmets-cookbook-library/>

**CHEW (Culinary History Enthusiasts of Wisconsin)** sponsored a December talk about a terrific writing workshop sponsored by The Odyssey Program held in the summer of 2009. The goal of the workshop for the adult students who face economic hardship was to continue academic work during summer break, to provide an environment for writing and discovery, and to allow participants to produce two very public pieces (a cookbook and a public talk at the South Madison Library Branch).

"Meals and Memories" was funded in part by the Wisconsin Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission, the Willy Street Coop Community Reinvestment Fund, and the South Madison Library Branch. Several CHEW members served as recipe testers for the "Meals and Memories" project. The Wisconsin State Journal covered the workshop in August, 2009 with a great article: [http://host.madison.com/news/local/article\\_1e9257a2-34c7-5f9a-a268-38aa94f01a1f.html](http://host.madison.com/news/local/article_1e9257a2-34c7-5f9a-a268-38aa94f01a1f.html). Look also at CHEW's wonderful Web site <http://chew.wisconsincooks.org/> for descriptions of past and future programs.

CHoW Line Editor thanks Shirley Cherkasky for the updates on the Odyssey Project for the past year.

## CHoW Member's Research Request

For a book on the history of American tuna, I am looking for any reference (citation, recipe, mention on a menu, advertisement, ships' logs, letter, etc.) to "tunny, thon marine, horse mackerel, albacore," etc., published prior to 1867 in the U.S. I have located several recipes in British and French cookbooks published in the US, but they are few and far between, and likely do not reflect American usage. I have also located several travel pieces about tunny in the Mediterranean published in the US, and I'm not interested in these either. Just American experiences with tuna prior to 1867.

I realize that few Americans ate tuna in the 18th and 19th centuries, and I'm interested in knowing their reasons for not doing so. As tuna is often plentiful off the east, west and gulf coasts, it just surprises me that there are not more references. --Andy Smith ([asmith1946@aol.com](mailto:asmith1946@aol.com))





# Culinary Humor

Thank you to CHoW members who sent in contributions to the Culinary Humor column. Keep the e-

mails coming to editor Dianne Hennessy King ([tuckking@aol.com](mailto:tuckking@aol.com)). Tom Weiland's contributions resume in the March CHoW Line.

## Pass the Peas, Honey.

Zina Pisarko writes about learning the background of what she thought was a nonsense rhyme when she memorized it sixty-odd years ago:

I eat my peas with honey,  
I've done it all my life.  
They do taste kind of funny,  
But it keeps them on the knife.

"I was reminded of it by a chapter in *The Evolution of Useful Things* by Henry Petroski (Vintage, 1992). He writes that the bulbous tip of the knife blade evolved to provide an efficient means of conveying food (such as peas) to the mouth, showing sets of 2-tined forks and rounded knives from 1670, 1690 and 1740.

He notes that "peas and other small discrete foods, which had been eaten by being pierced one by one with a knife point... could now be eaten more efficiently by being piled on the knife blade, whose increasingly backward curve made it possible to insert the food-laden tip into the mouth with less contortion of the wrist." He goes on to say that in America the fork did not displace the knife and spoon until the late 19th century.

The growing use of the fork in the late 19th century was not without its dissenters, who likened eating peas with a fork to "eating soup with a knitting needle." Zina added, "That old rhyme obviously was a jibe at those unrefined persons who had not yet learned to eat with a fork."

## A Cheesy Smile

Katherine Livingston reminds us, "It is not only humor that makes us smile; photographers also try. In his recent book *Alphabet Juice* (Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2008) Roy Blount Jr., citing Angus Trumble's *A Brief History of the Smile* (Basic Books, 2005), informs us not every culture says 'cheese' in order to smile for a photograph. In Spain it's *patata* (potato); in Denmark *appelsin* (orange); in Sweden, *omelett*; in Finland *muikku* (a kind of fish); in Korea *kim chi* (cabbage); in Poland *dzem* (marmalade); in China *ch'ieh tzu* (eggplant); and 'the letter x, pronounced *sheez*, much like cheese, though far softer, by Brazilian Portuguese speakers."

## The Advantage of Waiting for Ones Last Meal

Janet Dinerman offers an example of food humor based on cultural stereotypes, not to mention food as perhaps a clever lifesaver. Janet writes, "I read this today, and smiled. Source is Rosemary Zwick on [www.worldwiderecipes.com](http://www.worldwiderecipes.com)."

Three prisoners are captured in the war. They are asked what they wished to have for their last meal. The Italian asks for and receives a pepperoni pizza. The Frenchmen requests and receives a filet mignon. The American requests a plate of strawberries. The captors are surprised and reply, "Strawberries?"

"Yes, strawberries."

"But, they are out of season!"

"That's ok. I'll wait...."

## Aztec Precepts for Children on How to Live Better

Gina Jenkins, studying in Mexico this winter, sent fellow CHoW members something she translated for her Spanish class. Gina says, "It was written by Fray Bernardino de Sahagun in the 16th century, from the Aztec culture: 'Preceptos para saber vivir mejor para ninos' (Precepts for Children on How to Live Better)."

- Be advised, child, never eat with bad women because they might put a spell on you.
- Do not eat a lot in the morning and at night.
- Be temperate in food and at dinner.
- If you will be working, it is suitable to lunch before beginning work.
- When you eat, do not eat quickly, do not eat with too much self-assurance, nor with great mouthfuls, nor put a lot of food together in your mouth, nor gulp your food like a dog.
- You should eat calmly and quietly and you should drink with moderation.
- Do not tear your bread unnecessarily, nor snatch what is on the plate.
- Be calm when you eat, because it is not the time to make fun of those who are present.
- At the start of the meal, wash your hand and mouth, and the same after eating; and after having eaten, pick up that which has fallen on the ground, and you should sweep the dining area.
- After the meal you should wash your hands and mouth and clean your teeth.

## Welcome, New Members!

Patrick Evans-Hylton, Norfolk, VA. Virginia wine history; colonial foodways.

Susan Ginsberg, Silver Spring, MD. General history and collections (private; museum).

Nancy Muzeck, Washington, DC. World holiday traditional foods.

Abeba Telahun, South Riding, VA. History, cooking, nutritional benefits.

# Burns Night Supper, January 25

## 251st Anniversary of the Birth of Robert Burns



In response to the editor's request for information about Burns Night Supper, author **Kay Shaw Nelson** kindly allowed us permission to print a page from her book, *A Bonnie Scottish Cookbook* (EPM Publications, 1989). She also wrote *The Scottish-Irish Pub and Hearth Cookbook* (Hippocrene Books, Cloth 1999, Paperback 2009) and *The Art of Scottish- American Cooking* (Pelican Publishing Company, 2007). Kay adds a note: "I haven't been to one of these spirited events in recent years and don't know if I have the fortitude now – but hail to the Scots."



### Burns Night: A Scots Tradition

Throughout the world, Robert Burns's admirers don the tartan to honor the life and work of Scotland's beloved poet-hero on the anniversary of his birth, January 25. He died in 1796 and Burns clubs began as early as 1801.

'Tis a jolly gathering of nostalgic Scots, dressed in their finest, who sit down at tables but the legendary supper is a serious literary event as well as a ceremonial meal. First there is whisky. And then the prayer, known as the Selkirk Grace, about "being poor, honest and happy." It was repeated by Burns when dining with the Earl of Selkirk. "Some hae meat and canna et, And some wad eat that want it; But we hae meat and we can eat. And sae the Lord be thankit."



Haggis, neeps and tatties.

The meal begins with soup, Scotch Broth or Cock-A-Leekie, accompanied by whisky. Then, to the skirl of bagpipes, applause and cry of "Hail Great Chieftain," the haggis on a

silver platter arrives. Someone recites Burns's famous ode, "To A Haggis," and everyone joins in a Gaelic toast, slainte, or good health, to the hot and spicy haggis, drenched with whisky, that is ceremoniously cut with a skein dhu, a dirk (short straight dagger worn in the stocking.) It is served regally with "neeps an' tatties" (mashed turnips and potatoes) and "wee nips" of whisky.

As the evening warms up, there is singing of Burns's songs, followed by a principal Burns speech, the "Immortal Memory," an improvised oration, both serious and humorous, given by a distinguished guest.

After a rich dessert, such as Topsy Laird or cranachan, shortbreads, cakes, and perhaps cheese, there follow more heartfelt toasts, piping and spirited dancing. The celebrating goes on until the wee hours of the morning, ending with a rendition of "Auld Lang Syne," Burns's best-known song.

Can there be any doubt about the sturdiness of the Scots?

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### News of Our Members

**Karen Falk**, curator at the Jewish Museum of Maryland, is working on an exhibit about American Jewish foodways, looking at the ways in which people use food to model or explain their feelings about being Jewish. She reports, "We don't have much about the exhibit on the Jewish Museum Web site as yet, but there is a food poll that I'm trying to promote, asking people to name the 'most Jewish' foods. You can find it by clicking a link [Chosen Food] on the right side of the JMM home page at [www.jewishmuseummd.org](http://www.jewishmuseummd.org)." Karen plans to have more exhibit information and opportunities to participate up on the site soon.

**Amy Riolo** has a new book out in March, *The Mediterranean Diabetes Cookbook*, (American Diabetes Association, 2010). Amy's recent book *Nile Style: Egyptian Cuisine and Culture* (Hippocrene Cookbook Library, 2009) won the Gourmand Book Award for the area of Arab cuisine in the United States. It will compete against other Arab cuisine books from around the world for the title "Best Arab Cuisine Book" in the World in February 2010 in Paris.

**CiCi Williamson** wrote a guide to freezing food in the December 2 *Washington Post*. The interactive version is at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/artsandliving/foodanddining/graphics/the-big-chill/index.html>

# Chinese New Year, February 14, 2010

## Year of the Tiger

By Rebekah Lin Jewell

When I was a youngster, I was quite puzzled that one never asked you what year you were born, instead what was the animal sign for that year. Chinese New Year begins according to the Chinese calendar, which consists of both Gregorian and lunar-solar calendar systems. Because the track of the new moon changes from year to year, Chinese New Year can begin anytime between late January and mid-February. Below is a chart that shows the beginning day of Chinese New Year and the animal sign for that year.

### Date and Sign

2007 February 18 Pig  
2008 February 7 Rat  
2009 January 26 Ox  
2010 February 14 Tiger  
2011 February 3 Rabbit  
2012 January 23 Dragon  
2013 February 10 Snake  
2014 January 31 Horse  
2015 February 19 Sheep  
2016 February 8 Monkey  
2017 January 28 Rooster  
2018 February 16 Dog  
2019 February 5 Pig



The Chinese 12 animal signs will rotate every 12 years. For example if you were born in 2009, you are an Ox. You will be 12 in 2021 year and 24 in 2033 year and so on. When you are born in the year of Pig you could be 3, 15, 27, 39, 51, 63, 75, 87 and 109. Where birthdays are observed according to traditional Chinese reckoning, a child is one year old at his birth and two years of age after he passes into a New Year. In other words, if the child is born on New Year Eve, the next day he or she becomes 2 years old.

Just what is Chinese New Year? There's actually a lot more to it than lion dances and firecrackers, although these two pieces of tradition are integral and more visible. Chinese New Year to China is like Christmas to the West. The New Year has been the occasion for the settlement of debts, and it has been considered bad form to enter the New Year without having paid them. The day itself and the several following ones are devoted to feasting and visiting. Honors are paid to ancestors and there are family reunions. When old customs are followed, children make their obeisances to their parents and elders, pupils pay their respects to their teachers and friends call on one another and exchange good wishes.

While American, if we're lucky, we may get Christmas Eve day and Christmas Day off, and Europeans may take a whole week holiday, but Chinese New Year festivities

officially last for fifteen days. Businesses and factories usually only take about one week off.

Within China, regional customs and traditions concerning the celebration of the Chinese new year vary widely. People will pour out their money to buy presents, decorations, material, food, and clothing. It is also the tradition that every family thoroughly cleans the house to sweep away any ill-fortune in hopes to make way for good incoming luck. Windows and doors will be decorated with red color paper-cuts and couplets with popular themes of "happiness," "wealth," and "longevity." On the Eve of Chinese New Year, supper is a feast with families. Food will range from pigs, to ducks, to chicken and sweet delicacies. The family will end the night with firecrackers. Early the next morning, children will greet their parents by wishing them a healthy and happy New Year, and receive money in red paper envelopes. The Chinese New Year tradition is a great way to reconcile, forgetting all grudges, and sincerely wishing peace and happiness for everyone.

Since I am a Chinese cooking instructor, I like to talk about food the last. There are many foods in Chinese culture associated with the Chinese New Year. Although preferences vary from region to region, I would like to talk about foods of my own province of Fukien when I was growing up in Mainland China and also in Taiwan— foods that my mother used to serve us during these big festivals.

**Chinese New Year cake (*niangao*):** eating *niangao* has the symbolism of raising oneself higher in each coming year. I especially enjoyed my mom frying the day-old sliced cake wrapped in the beaten egg and pan fried in the oil.

**Prosperity Cake (*fagao*):** *fagao* batter is steamed until it rises and splits open at the top.

**Spring rolls:** Chinese New Year is also called Spring Festival. Once the spring rolls are fried to golden brown, they look very much like gold bars.

**Mandarin oranges:** a symbol of wealth and good fortune.

**Red jujubes:** symbolizes the gaining of prosperity.

**Whole steamed fish:** a symbol of long life and good fortune.

**Chicken:** with its head and feet intact, symbolizes prosperity.

*Rebekah Lin Jewell is the author of The Art of Chinese Cooking (AuthorHouse, 2009) and has taught Chinese cooking classes for groups large and small for close to 30 years. For more information, see [www.artofchinesecooking.com](http://www.artofchinesecooking.com).*



## Lost and Found Flavor – *Farinata*

Article and photo by Claudia Kousoulas

**M**y grandmother, Ida DeJoannis, left Liguria at 16 for Manhattan where she was to keep house for her parents who worked as tailors. But in some ways she never left. Her memories of the village that raised her, Valeriano, became our family's defining stories.

One of her most vivid memories was of *farinata*, a chickpea flour flatbread. You may know it as *socca*, a Niçoise streetfood, cooked in a copper pan and served hot to market shoppers. Julia Child featured a film snippet of the *socca* vendor on his bicycle in one of her shows.

And just as *fougasse* crosses the border and becomes focaccia, *socca* becomes *farinata*, served the same way, finished with olive oil, salt, and pepper, sliced into wedges and handed over to hungry shoppers, including little girls on a trip to the city.

Ligurian food is noted for its leanness. It has none of the butter and cream of Bologna "La Grassa" and none of the baroque styling of Sicilian pastries. "A relationship with simple things is so developed here that humble products... little appreciated elsewhere, enjoy the highest consideration," writes Elena Kostioukovich in *Why Italians Like to Talk About Food*. But it is *cucina povera*, the simple things, which often have the strongest hold on us.

And they are the hardest to reproduce. My grandmother never forgot *farinata*, and we tried to recreate it for her – hunting Italian chickpea flour in Boston's North End, recruiting an engineer uncle to translate measurements and temperature from Italian recipes, experimenting with cast iron pans and aluminum cookie sheets.

But it was never quite right and we blamed it on the water or the flour or the oven. Of course it wasn't right. She was no longer a little girl and no longer home. One day when we were again discussing this elusive food, she said, "Some rich Italian should set it up here, so people would know, or go back and bring it over, so we could have it, because it is so good. People should know, they would like it."

It would have to be a rich Italian because the economics of *farinata* make no sense. You can't meet restaurant overhead selling chickpea flatbread. You keep the overhead low by selling it from your bicycle, or you add value, like Ben Barker of the Magnolia Grill does – he serves it with a confit of shrimp and crabmeat dressed with saffron vinaigrette.

But Italians also took their foodways to South America and created a different kind of abundance. They added

prodigious amounts of beef to their diets, but also held on to humble foods. *Farinata* became *faina* in Argentina and Uruguay--countries with significant Italian populations. And taking the value-added approach, it is often served on top of a slice of pizza.

I found *faina* in Miami Beach, in cafes like Manolo (a North American outpost of an Argentine snack shop) and at El Rey del Chivito (an Uruguayan sandwich shop) where I realized it was the *farinata* my grandmother described. *Faina* persists on menus filled with excessive dishes like hot dogs wrapped in bacon or *chivito* sandwiches – layers of skirt steak, ham, cheese, lettuce, tomato, and a fried egg. Even amid abundance, the simple things can last.

After tracking and tracing, I feel as though I've finally had a small taste of what my grandmother remembered.

The varied descriptions of *farinata* – crepe, pancake, flatbread, *foccaccia* – fall short of describing it. Without leavening, it is flat, but without gluten it is also a bit crumbly and blistered from the oven's high heat. It doesn't have the sweet, wheaty flavor of a pancake but a nutty savouriness highlighted by liberal dousing of olive oil.



This recipe will get you started:

- 1 cup chickpea flour (try to find Italian rather than Indian flour)
  - 1 teaspoon salt
  - 1 cup water
  - 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Chopped fresh rosemary (optional)  
Freshly ground pepper, sea salt

Mix the flour, salt, water, and olive oil with a whisk until it is smooth. Let the batter sit for an hour (or up to overnight in the fridge). Stir in the rosemary, if you are using it.

Pour the batter into a oiled cookie sheet with sides or a 12-inch cast iron skillet. It should not be more than 1/4 inch deep.

Cook the *farinata* in a 450 °F oven for about 12 minutes. Drizzle some olive oil and set it under the broiler for a few minutes to brown.

Sprinkle with sea salt and pepper, and serve in slices.

If you want a less lean dish, *farinata* goes well wrapped around caramelized onions, arugula, or slivers of pecorino.

*Claudia Kousoulas is an editor and publications manager with the Montgomery County Planning Department and is also a freelance food and features writer. Her stories and cookbook reviews appear in Washington Woman, Cookbook Digest, and online at AppetiteforBooks.com and at booksforcooks.com. She served as CHoW President for two years and as a Director for four years.*