



A Grain of Truth.



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y parents always cooked a full dinner for me and my sister after they came home from work. When I think back to it now, I am in awe of their dedication to our family meals. We sat around a large round oak table at six o'clock and talked and ate. It was sesame peanut noodles, or breaded tofu, or my favorite, noodle pudding (a passed down Jewish kugel recipe, see page 95) or my dad's favorite, beer-can chicken. (We were always subjected to viewing the chicken body sitting upright on the can. To my dad, that ridiculous image never got old.) My job was usually to set the table, or clear the table, or make the salad. I didn't have much interest in helping my parents cook aside from making easy omelettes and pancakes some mornings.



In college I was poor. I remember buying a huge carton of individually packaged Cup o' Noodles from Costco for quick, cheap meals and overfilling my plate at the dining hall when I had points left on my card. After college when I moved to Brooklyn and started making some money, I ate out all the time. In one block of my neighborhood, you could take an inexpensive food

tour around the world from Israel to Vietnam to Greece just a few doors down the street. When the automatic food ordering apps came around a few years ago, I could click checkout and twenty minutes later there was food at my door- falafel with red cabbage slaw, a spicy tofu Bahn Mai sandwich or a big Mediterranean salad with stuffed grape leaves and lebni on the side.

I gained an interest in food around the time I started working on my first book in this series. Farm Anatomy, about seven years ago. I stopped eating meat and paid more attention to seasonal fruits and vegetables. I began shopping more at the farmer's market near my apartment in Grand Army Plaza, and buying more organic and locally grown produce. This meant I had to cook more, or at least prepare more food. I got rid of my microwave and bought a fancy Japanese knife. I took a cooking class at the International Culinary Center in vegan cooking and learned a few techniques. (Though I mistakenly grated a bit of my finger into one of the dishes so it wasn't technically vegan!).

I am still very much a beginner cook, but I am not a beginner at eating. This book gave me a chance to explore that further. I tried to taste most of the things I drew. I went to a variety of Asian markets and came home to puree Chinese yams into pancakes and grate real fresh wasabi root. I tasted dragonfruit and horned melon, but I couldn't bring myself to eat durian. (I opened it just a crack to see what the smelly fuss was all



about. I attempted, and failed to bring even a tiny piece close to my face. Instead, I laughed hysterically and practically gagged at the intense odor.)

The trips I took while working on this book became chances to try more dishes In Amsterdam I sampled dozens of cheeses, some aged in bunkers for years, and paired them with beers brewed in an old windmill. In Uganda, I had matoke and enjoyed Rolexes (eggs rolled up in chapati) for breakfast. In Finland, I learned to make traditional rye bread from a hundred-plus-year-old root. I carved my own mixing tool from a spruce tree to use on the dough. I visited a strawberry plantation and picked the sweetest strawberries I've ever tasted (the long days full of sunshine make them exceptional.) In the winter I foraged through the snow-covered forest for chanterelles that made their way onto a pizza for a New Year's Eve celebration.

This past Thanksgiving was my biggest cooking achievement to date. I invited my parents and sister to my tiny Brooklyn apartment to celebrate the holiday. Over the phone, my mother pleaded, "Are you sure? No turkey? Why don't I make one and bring it just in case?" I assured her it would be great, though I hadn't fully convinced myself yet. I prepared a menu of coconut milk-based lentil soup, kale and farro salad, creamy potatoes, roasted kabocha squash, sriracha-coated Brussels sprouts and sweet potato pie for dessert. Miraculously, the comments coming from my family were "wow, this is actually really delicious" and "better than regular Thanksgiving."

My writing partner was Rachel Wharton. Her expertise in the culinary world made up for everything I am still learning. She shared her knowledge and researched what she didn't know. We tried to cover a range of topics on everything we could think of. But that is always impossible and this is only a small taste of what we thought would be interesting to collect and draw.

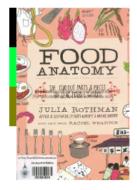
You wouldn't believe how hungry I got working on this book. As I looked back at my photos or searched the Internet for good references of meals to draw, I immediately had to run to my fridge and try and replicate the food. Cravings were unbearable and I am excited to have finished this book so I can lose the weight I gained making it.

I hope this book will inspire you to experiment with more cooking, be more curious about what you're eating, and go on more food adventures as I will continue to do. Cheers!

Julia Pothman

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## https://lib.rmutp.ac.th/catalog/BibItem.aspx?BibID=b00107102





Author Rothman, Julia

Published North Adams MA: Storey Publishing, 2016

 $\begin{array}{ll} \textbf{Detail} & 221 \ p: il \ ; 23 \ cm \\ \textbf{Subject} & \textbf{Cooking(+)} \\ & \textbf{Food(+)} \end{array}$ 

Added Author Wharton, Rachel

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