DOUG LESLIE BURSARY

DOUG LESLIE was The Link’s first editor-in-chief. When he passed away in 2012, a bursary fund was set up in his name. Every year $1,000 is distributed in his honor to Linkies in financial need, either entirely to one person or split between two.

The award will be available to a registered, returning student who is in financial need and is a staff member (reporter, designer, photographer, artist, etc.) of The Link. Staff members are those who have made four (4) contributions in four separate publishing weeks this semester.

Applicants must include a one-to-two-page letter explaining their level of financial need, merit and motivation for the bursary, and how you plan on contributing to The Link in the coming year, and how the bursary will help you do so. You’ll also need to include three (3) of your contributions to the publication.

Questions on eligibility can be addressed to editor@thelinknewspaper.ca

The deadline for submission is Friday November 27, 2020 at 5:00 p.m.

Send application in PDF form to secretary@thelinknewspaper.ca

The bursary recipient(s) will be announced the third week of January 2021.

The following contributors and masthead members are eligible to apply: Jad Abukasm, Joey Bruce, Esteban Cuevas, Alexandre Denis, Nicholas Dundorf, Elias Grigoriadis, Nanor Froundjian, Michele Malsani, Sheena Mcmillan, Olivier Never, Mzwandile Poncana, Ray Resvick, April Tardif-Levesques

The following contributors need one more submission to be eligible: Maria Chabelnik, Autumn Darey, Caroline Marsh, Abegail Ranaudo, Bree Rockbrand, Gabriela Vasquez-Rondon

The following contributors need two more submissions to be eligible: Matilda Carone, Mariana Chajon Oliveros, William Cokerell, Daylen Conserve, Chahinez Dib, Talia Kliot, Miriam Lafontaine, Carleen Loney, Thomas Lundy, Evan Milner, Stephanie Ricci, Matthew Skelhorne, Kate Lindsay Taeuschel, Peter Vryonis
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Tu veux bien manger?

Pas de problème! Voici une recette pour tout ce qui reste dans le frigo.

You’ve been working all the time so you didn’t have time to cook, but you can’t afford to replace your wilted, shrivelled, and stale groceries? No problem! This student “touski” will fill your belly. Don’t worry, it won’t kill you. And one day we’ll all have a good laugh about it… Right?

STUDENT TOUSKI

- There appears to be no mold on the black beans, so use them
- 1 tbsp. whipped dressing (off-brand—it’s the tangy taste of Miracle Zip)
- 1 tbsp. cashew butter from payday
- 2 limp carrots, peeled
- 1 tbsp. Pixian doubanjiang
- Woah, did you know you had spinach? It’s still mostly good.
- 1 corn tortilla, quartered
- Good news! You had 3/4 of a lasagna sheet in your freezer. (Now you’re in carb heaven.)
- You have a tub of vanilla ice cream. “One litre of pure pleasure!” You can’t resist—but try to keep it to a tbsp. or two.
- Two sachets of orange pekoe tea (this will help you stay up all night to study after work)
- Water is free! It’s full of lead, but 2 cups shouldn’t hurt you too bad.

Step 1: Combine in pot.
Step 2: Bring to boil, simmer for 15 minutes. Don’t forget this step, it’s important for killing food-borne bacteria.

Voilà! You’ll live to study another day.
In food, we find all the essential nutrients for our survival. But it goes far beyond simple nourishment. It plays a central role in our social lives. Who doesn’t have fond childhood memories related to their favorite dish? Everyone loves to share an exquisite meal with friends or family, and the concept of comfort food resonates beyond cultural barriers.

Food is an important symbol of cultures and religious beliefs. Many factors influence what we put on our plates and the role food plays in our lives. It can hardly be discussed without a consideration of disparities and inequities.

As we get closer to a year of COVID-19’s submission hold on the world, we do what we can to retain whatever bit of pre-pandemic normalcy we can. One important relationship that has risen to the spotlight is our connection with food.

As dining out is not a viable option at the moment, with Montreal’s red zone status extended until late November, eating in isolation has taken on special significance for some. Hundreds of foodies, inspired and most likely bored in quarantine, created social media pages where they shared daily meals and recipes for hungry followers. Dinner dates at fancy restaurants were replaced with cute picnics by the Lachine Canal that included wine and take-out food from local eateries. Orders placed on food delivery apps have soared since lockdowns began, bringing customers their favourite burgers or fried tofu dishes.

Food is not only a pleasurable experience or solace, however. For many, it is a daily struggle, with many suffering from food insecurity or eating disorders.

Despite this, our society stands at the altar of food, making it available in every way imaginable. Food unites families, keeps cultures and history alive, and provides insights on the landscape of a place. Food can be studied through so many lenses and is one of the most unifying ways humans can connect. Learning about others through food, learning about ourselves, and learning about food as a social issue can teach us a great deal about our fellow human beings.

Yet, food is far from accessible to all people, despite the fact that it should be considered a human right. Capitalism has commodified food and warped its accessibility, quality, and meaning. As we launch The Food Issue, we hope to show that food is more than a commodity, more than a choice between chain restaurants, and more than a luxury. Food is both essential to our survival and the survival of our cultures.

Food can be seen as an elitist activity on Instagram and television, but some of the best food you will find is outside of a fancy filter or expensive cooking equipment. Food is for everyone and can be made by anyone. Sharing a meal means sitting down with one another, something we need to do more often.
Food Manifesto

2020

Food should entail and employ a holistic process.
Food should be associated with pleasure.
Food should be nourishing, affordable, and available.
Food is fundamental.
emotional manipulation
Food is a passport to our past.
Food should be fuel for the mind, body and soul.
Food Should be a peaceful, universal language.
Food brings people of all backgrounds and cultures together.
A way to connect with people and places.
Food should keep us alive and together.
Food is art that represents one’s emotions.
Food should be a symbol of our way of life.
Food should be a period of enjoyment. Sensory experience and health promoting.
I believe food should be a time of appreciation and joy.
Food should always be appreciated and enjoyed with the ones we love most.
Food is a necessity, there should not be any taxes on it.
I think food should be medium for us to create connections with others.
It should be affordable and mostly vegetables and fruits.
nourishing in terms of carnal needs and social connectivity.
Food should be tasteful, enjoyed but especially shared.

Food should be our medicine.
delicious & nutritious
An experience
Food is our connection to life.
nourishing
exciting
health and happiness.
Comfort
Accessible
Assemblage
Unity
Sharing
Health
Delicacy
Food should be an experience.
comforting
Art
FUN!
Celebration
food for meaningful lives
JOY
Burst of Flavour

82 Students
Answer the Question:
“What is food, or what should food be?”

Happiness
satisfying hunger
Food for thought
Food is Passion | Love.
FUEL
Food as a cultural expression
you are what you eat
food should be fulfilling
Food should be cherished
accessible for everyone
Family
An experience.
Happiness
Nutrition
Food is energy
togetherness
Uniting people together
Food is a connection.
Food brings people together
Thoughtful and intentional
Nutritional
self expression
food fuel is fuel and nourishment to our physical, mental, and spiritual souls and the centerpiece of family gatherings; the glue that brings people together and creates memories.

Food should not only be about satisfying our hunger, it should be an experience to enjoy.

Food connects us to each other, to other living beings and the land. Food is how we become part of the landscape, incorporating into our bodies. Food should honour our embodied relationship with the world around us.

Food should be a source of nutrition, happiness, and enjoyment for all human beings.

Food should be a new experience every time you eat something, surrounded by people you love.

Food is a resource of edible materials that contribute to the general growth, reproduction, health, and maintenance (survival) of living organisms and cells.

Food is an in-flux substance where we engage with in pragmatic, emotional, cultural, economical and political ways.

An individual preference; it can mean whatever an individual wants it to mean.

Food should look to not only fill one’s energy, but also pleasure.

Food should be spatially just, and fair to producer and consumer alike.

food to me is an escape, as it always brings me to another part of the world nourishing for the body and the soul, grown and harvested in harmony with the planet and its inhabitants, and accessible to all.

Food should be nurturing, tasty, culturally appropriate, exciting, fresh, spicy, healthy, unhealthy, rich, light, shared, snacked on, plentiful, beautiful, sloppy, delicate and available to all.

Food is expression. It is a way to share thoughts, feelings, culture, and who we are.

As much as food is to keep us alive, I also think because we all eat it no matter where we come from; it should be an experience where people can share a moment with another human. Sometimes this experience can be larger than words. Inevitably, it can be an emotional experience.

Food should be looked at as something historical, as certain foods have been around longer than we think!
Building Community Through Food Production

How a Concordia PhD student is working to integrate refugee women into Bâtiment 7’s urban agriculture project

Marie-Alix Motte

Food possesses an extraordinary power to unite strangers around a shared affinity. Specific flavours and ingredients can bring a sense of home when abroad. Food is meant to be shared with family and community.

This love for food and feeling of community is just what the people behind Bâtiment 7 envisioned for their small urban farm, the Fermette project.

“Part of the goal of Bâtiment 7 is to contribute to fostering a local and inclusive food system,” said Joseph Bergeron, project coordinator for Bâtiment 7, so they created an agriculture project designed to enhance food autonomy in Pointe-Saint-Charles.

A former industrial site, Bâtiment 7 is now a communal place where diverse community-oriented projects, workshops, and events take place. The collective 7 à Nous is charged with preserving this environment and enhancing local involvement and kinship. Bâtiment 7 aspires to drive a social, environmental, cultural, political, and economic transformation within the neighborhood.

The Fermette project

The Fermette is a year-old community project involving several organizations, including Bâtiment 7, Action Gardien, the Club Populaire des consommateurs de PSC, Épicerie Le Détour, and 7 à Nous.

Research around financing and resources for the project began in fall 2019. It is important the project encompasses the whole process of food from its production to transformation and conservation, followed by the sale of the product and finishing with the
composting and recycling of agricultural waste.

Permaculture has been chosen as the most sustainable cultivation method. This entails the selection of adequate crops using each other’s nutrients to grow them properly without the use of external chemicals. Today, the Fermette project is composed of a greenhouse, an orchard, medicinal plants, a henhouse, and community areas managed by volunteers and local organizations.

Involving refugee women

This project took a step further in its social impact in part thanks to Zeina El Omari, a PhD student at Concordia who in spring suggested including women refugees in the project. When she arrived in Canada, El Omari was missing the contact with nature she had in France and Lebanon. She began her agricultural journey 16 years ago in her garden where she created a forêt nourricière, functioning as a real ecosystem sourcing its energy and nutrients from the surrounding plants and even facing predators such as cats or squirrels.

While she was doing her individualized program at Concordia, she had the opportunity to take part in the Living Labs initiative at Concordia. This initiative is a funding strategy that was created in partnership with Concordia’s Office of Community Engagement and the Sustainability Action Fund. It was through this that she discovered the Fermette project.

El Omari is part of what is called feminist active participatory research, meaning she is not only studying and trying to come up with theories, but she actually wants to see the transformation take place.

The idea of including women refugees started with Zeina being a research assistant for assistant professor Natalie Kouri-Towe of Concordia, who studies critical refugee studies with a focus on Syrian refugees.

Their research focuses on the refugees sponsored by the government who are usually coming from lower social classes. Women are often in charge of cultivating the land, therefore holding an important place in the family’s organization and economy.

To include women refugees in the agricultural cycle, the coordinators plan to provide them with other knowledge through the implementation of specific workshops. “But those workshops are not functioning as a school as those women, who already possess their own savoir-faire. We just want to enable them to use their existing know-how while helping them to give a new purpose in their life when coming to Canada,” said El Omari.

The first step is for the women to learn more about permaculture and North American crops, then to focus on the storage, cooking, or fermentation of the harvest in the kitchen within the Bâtiment 7 site.

Finally, the coordinators wish to give them the necessary expertise to start a small business or to reproduce the concept in other communities around Montreal in the future. Talks are ongoing with microfinance organizations to provide the necessary resources.

The production is already in part sold at the Bâtiment 7 non-profit grocery store, Le Detour, and there are plans to sell to other nearby stores.

The ambition is to give refugee women the tools to integrate their new community properly while not forgetting about their culture. Indeed, they should not leave their home culture aside but bring their knowledge into the project as well.

Upcoming challenges

The pandemic provided the necessary time to reach out to refugee organizations, microfinance organizations, and people with adequate agricultural or cooking skills, but it also delays the workshops. Most refugees do not live near Bâtiment 7 or possess the technological equipment to follow the workshops if they were online. El Omari hopes these will be underway by summer.

The Fermette is a pilot project that will help the agricultural component of Bâtiment 7 flourish, said Bergeron. The next step is to work with the City of Montreal to develop adjacent land, known as lot 5, to create a larger agricultural space and be more autonomous.

This community project is all about making new kinships and restoring the feeling of home while creating a sustainable ecosystem within Montreal—thanks to the unique power of food.

“There is an extraordinary enthusiasm that I was not expecting at all about this project when reaching out to refugee organizations,” said El Omari. “The COVID pandemic served as a wakeup call about food sovereignty, and people are getting more aware.”
Resilience: Putting Food on the Table Despite Climate Change

The agriculture industry on adapting to the unpredictable

Christine Beaudoin

In July, Gabriel Leblanc, who grows vegetables on a small farm in Rimouski, did not know if his crops were going to make it through the summer. “Seeing the plants die one by one, you don’t really know what to do,” he said.

At that time, Québec was going through a drought so severe that it called for a crisis unit to be formed. It was the third drought to strike the province in the last four years, and it was the most widespread.

Although individual extreme weather events such as this summer’s drought are difficult to directly attribute to climate change, climate change brings these events at a higher frequency. Canada’s Climate Change Report 2019 states that “until climate is stabilized, there will not be a new ‘normal’ climate.”

That such events have wreaked havoc on Quebec’s agriculture industry in recent years raises concern: What is the industry doing to address the rising instability of climate and the potential food security issues that could ensue?

From research labs to producers’ initiatives to small farmers’ strategies, those in the agricultural industry need to find ways to keep feeding the world while facing growing climate instability. They need to keep standing when the world crashes down. They need resilience.

The Geomatic Agroclimate and Observations of the Earth is a federal research division concerned with providing leadership in the development of a competitive, innovative, and sustainable Canadian agriculture industry and food supply chain. Alain Houde, director of research, leads this team and several others that dive into the question of food security in the current and future climate contexts.

One of them, based in Ottawa, studies the resilience of agroecosystems. Some of Houde’s teams also take a look at the possibility of using vertical and greenhouse farming to secure affordable, healthy, and diverse foods for vulnerable and remote communities, namely Indigenous communities, as “food security is essential for health and well-being.”

As the climate warms, it may become possible to cultivate a greater array of foods in northern parts of Quebec, although Houde warns it may not be economically viable to maintain a greenhouse’s ideal climate when outside temperatures drop below -40 or -50 degrees Celsius, even with a warming north.

Specialists working with Houde also study changes in precipitation, especially droughts and floods, to build models that have the best possible ability to predict the impact of future climate on agriculture. Their work has yielded the Canadian Drought Monitor, which publishes maps of drought-prone areas, updated monthly.

No matter how good researchers get at making predictive models, “climate change still produces highly unpredictable situations,” admits Houde.

Beyond labs, some are working in the field on solutions for what is coming. Agriclimat, an initiative launched by Québécois farmers, aims to have a better understanding of how climate change impacts agriculture and what can be done to prepare for it.

Resilience of farms is an integral part of their vision, “by build-
ing [farmers’] capacity to take climate change projections into account in major business decisions, while contributing to sustainable agricultural development.” This project bets on educating participants on farming practices better adapted to future realities through the advice of twenty-some specially trained professionals.

On Leblanc’s small farm, a non-profit organization called La Dérive, resilience means diversity, healthy soils, and mutual support within a community.

In terms of diversity, Leblanc explains that planting a wide range of crops that react differently to varying weather patterns increases the likelihood of having food to put on the table. For example, if drought strikes, a certain type of crop may die, but another one with greater resistance to dry weather could still have a successful harvest.

Diversity in crops helps ensure that some succeed. It also contributes to keeping soils healthy, stresses Leblanc, as healthy soils are key to healthy crops.

He cited diminishing pesticide usage and the application to soil of clay humus complexes, which act as water and chemical reservoirs and improve adaptability to changes in precipitation, as complementary strategies for keeping soils healthy and resilient.

Although sustainability is central to La Dérive’s farming practices, its ultimate mission is a “social one” to allow economic and physical access to local and ecological foods for people in economically difficult situations. They mainly provide for vulnerable communities, while also selling their products to the public at large.

Meanwhile, the Canadian government is working on a food policy that aims for every Canadian to be “able to access a sufficient amount of safe, nutritious, and culturally diverse food.” As part of the program, several funds are put in place.

The Local Food Infrastructure Fund supports community-based, not-for-profit organizations in improving the infrastructure used to address food insecurities, while the Surplus Food Rescue Program helps redirect surpluses to avoid wasting these products.

Helping farmers keep up their practice, the Financière agricole du Québec offers a variety of risk management programs to compensate them during difficult years, while putting together regular reaping and compensation request reports. The Fund for the Protection of the Environment and the Waters in the Domain of the State, on the other hand, helps resilient farming at the source by supporting sustainability-focused projects.

As such, many initiatives in the form of research, educational material, and financial support exist to address the alarming risks of climate change on food security at both the provincial and the national level. In a climate of uncertainty, the only constant is the search for resilience.

As Leblanc puts it, “it is a learning process,” where improvements are observed year after year.

“SEEING THE PLANTS DIE ONE BY ONE, YOU DON’T REALLY KNOW WHAT TO DO.” — GABRIEL LEBLANC
Aphrodisiacs Could Be the Spark You've Been Looking For

Feeling uninspired? Eat these foods to get your groove on

Reina Ephrahim

Like thirst, excretion, slumber, and sexual activity, food is essential to the body. It is present in nearly every aspect of our lives.

We can find food in art. We see it in fairy tales and literature, with poisonous apples putting princesses to sleep. We see food in religious symbolism. The forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden is but one example.

We even see promiscuity through sexual connotations of certain foods. Needless to say, eating bananas, cucumbers, or eggplants will never be the same.

Speaking of which, remember that time Timothée Chalamet fucked a peach in Call Me by Your Name?

Maybe you were shocked by the sight of him arousing himself à la peach. Maybe you were disgusted. If you were anything like me, you may have thought, “Damn, I wish I was that peach.” Can you blame me?

*Sigh*—Oh, to be a fucking peach.

I digress. The fetishization of food is nothing new in the realm of kinknormativity. If there is anything lifestyle magazines have taught us, it is that the latest sexual trend is sure to keep your man/womxn in the sack. They claim some foods are more arousing, meaning snacking on certain foods equals better sex.

A quick search in Cosmopolitan yields six articles on aphrodisiac foods—foods said to increase sexual arousal or desire, even performance.

In one Cosmo piece, Dr. Diana Hoppe explains how vitamin C is essential to the production of sex hormones and libido-boosting neurotransmitters. The omega-3 fatty acid present in almonds and walnuts provide similar hormonal production.

Avocados contain vitamin B6, which increases testosterone levels. Chocolate contains phenylethylamine, believed to increase several upbeat neurological chemicals, according to an article published by the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

And who could forget red wine, which contains an antioxidant that reduces inflammation, stimulating blood flow in the erogenous areas and increasing testosterone production.

There you have it! If you’ve been feeling sexually repressed by quarantine, you can blame it on all the food you’ve been experimenting with over these last few months.

But although the vitamins and nutrients contained in certain foods conserve bodily substances linked to a healthy sex drive, there’s a catch.

“I think it’s important to remember that the purpose of most media, and certainly all lifestyle magazines, is to make money with their publication,” said Ryan Conrad, who teaches in the interdisciplinary studies in sexuality program at Concordia.

“The fact of the matter is that sex and sexuality are quite mundane. Both can be found in nearly every crevice of our lives—in the clothes we wear, in the ways we consume media, and especially in food.

Conrad believes that consumers must continue to develop their media literacy skills, especially around sex.

“Were things so simple they could be easily unpacked in the titillating columns of lifestyle magazines, we wouldn’t have the need for university programs dedicated to the study of human sexuality,” he said.

Still, think about your options on your next grocery run. The world is your oyster. One way or another, you are nourishing yourself.

Graphic Florent Aniorte
A Love Letter to Dep Wine

Some say life is too short for bad wine. Life is too short for many things; it is definitely too short for no wine. So when it’s past 10 p.m. on a Saturday and you find yourself with a melancholic thirst, dep wine will have to do.

It is a drink of convenience, of frugality, of those who don’t know better and those who do. The acrid taste of a $10 bottle might make the weak willed turn their nose up, but to love wine is to love all wine. There’s a bottle for every occasion, and you won’t bring champagne to get drunk at Parc Lafontaine.

All wines are for sharing, and sure, a Beaujolais is nice between friends, but dep wine is the bottle you bring to a house party for everyone to drink out of. Pour it in a mug, or straight into the mouth of someone you just met. There’s a wine for every occasion, and each is as important.

Buying it is a breeze. Why worry about Merlot vs. Chardonnay when all it will taste is different shades of bad. Avoid the Keep Calm wines out of principle, but experience a shopping free of condescension and confusion. Just hum along to your favourite Billy Joel song as you ask yourself whether you want a bottle of white, a bottle of red, perhaps a bottle of rose instead?

In wine there is truth, and the truth in dep wine is that life without wine is sad.

— Alexandre Denis
The Magic of Mama Ouy’s Kitchen

How a home kitchen became a go-to for Cambodian takeout

“We all have really big personalities, so we do clash a bit. But it’s actually a lot of fun, and it’s brought us a lot closer,” said Anika Ouy. Photos Thomas Lundy
It was a chilly afternoon in the St-Laurent borough of Montreal. The community was quiet, the sky still undecided over whether it wanted to rain.

For many people, this would have been a perfect afternoon for movies and tea. But at Mama Ouy’s, Heany Kuy Ouy was hard at work with her two daughters, cooking up a flurry of southeast Asian dishes. The dining table was covered with a spread of pre-made foods, empty takeout boxes, and an iPad with a list of this week’s orders.

“We’re a home-cooking business,” explained Alida Ouy, one of the daughters in the Ouy household. “We highlight our mother’s cooking, and we try to make traditional southeast Asian food that you can’t get in restaurants.”

They named their operation Mama Ouy’s, a reflection of Heany’s leadership in the kitchen and her role as matriarch of the family. Together they repurposed their home kitchen into a takeout machine, and they were getting ready for the dinner rush.

Mama Ouy’s is part of a growing trend of online takeout businesses that have emerged because of the pandemic. “Me and my sister, we weren’t working anymore. We weren’t in school,” explained Anika Ouy, the youngest of the two sisters. “We just thought it would be a fun project.”

The Ouys don’t sell their food on UberEats or in a restaurant, instead, they advertise their food on various Facebook community groups or through their Instagram page. Customers order directly through the social media chat function, and schedule a time to stop by the Ouy household and pick up their food.

Mama Ouy’s is part of a growing trend of social media home-kitchen takeout services. Facebook groups like Local 88, SHOP LOCAL – Montreal, and Montreal Food Scene host a number of advertisements for peoples’ home-cooked creations. Many of them will specialize in some kind of traditional food, from Haitian spicy peanut butter to fresh Vietnamese soup.

At Mama Ouy’s, Heany oversees all the cooking. She specializes in Cambodian food, but also tries to work in recipes from other southeast Asian countries like Vietnam and Singapore.

On October 10, she had a mix of items on the menu. The main course was Borbor Sach Moan Kuy Teav Cha, a Cambodian–Chinese rice porridge with bean sprouts, dried shrimp, and dried octopus. For dessert, a sweet pudding made with pumpkin, tapioca, and coconut milk.

While Heany is busy in the kitchen, Alida and Anika run the social media pages, photograph the food, and pack the orders neatly to give to customers.

Heany Kuy Ouy immigrated to Canada to escape the Cambodian civil war in the 1970s. She is the oldest of her family and went to work quickly after she arrived. She learned how to make sushi and opened a restaurant in Côte-des-Neiges. She then moved on to open a number of food kiosks in malls around Montreal. She eventually sold her kiosks and is now retired.

“She’s always grown up being her own boss,” explained Alida. “She’s very matriarchal, powerful, and independent.”

Heany says that she’s happy that she can now make the food that she wants to make. She also enjoys sharing her cooking with people who may not have tried Cambodian food before.

“I like to work with my daughters because it’s easy. When there’s lots to do, I can scream at them! And they’re able to help me do things that I’m not able to do when I’m busy cooking.”

Alida and Anika are used to helping their mother with her cooking. Since they were little, they would do small jobs around Heany’s sushi kiosk.

“We all have really big personalities, so we do clash a bit,” said Anika. “But it’s actually a lot of fun, and it’s brought us a lot closer.”

Since the Ouys launched their business, they have reached almost 1,000 followers on Instagram. Since then, they have connected with other cooks who are putting a spotlight on southeast Asian food.

The Ouy family do not know if they will continue cooking for long, but they are willing to consider new business opportunities should they arise. At a minimum, they are grateful for what they have accomplished so far.

“We’ve become part of a community that we didn’t know existed,” said Alida. “We hope we can leave an impact on people even if we stop.”
Food Security at a Distance

How Concordia’s food groups are confronting community hunger with emergency food baskets

Lauren Terrell @ltntrll

COVID-19 has produced a challenging new way of life—one that is distanced, limited, and bleak—but when we consider those hit hardest by the pandemic, the challenges are not a matter of normalcy but of survival.

Many individuals have been dealing with food insecurity since the start of the pandemic, as shelters and food banks have been required to reorganize, completely uproot, or stop their services. In response to increased demand, organizations across Montreal and within Concordia have adopted emergency food basket initiatives as a way to foster food security while also building relationships with local farmers.

Food security describes the extent to which individuals have access to enough affordable food to provide proper nutrition and subsistence.

“There was already a call for food security and a need for it,” said Nora Fabre, external coordinator for the Concordia Food Coalition. “And these food basket programs are sort of like the readapted versions of what once was when campus was open.”

According to Food Insecurity Policy Research, food insecurity exists on a spectrum that includes things like worrying about whether your next paycheque will buy groceries, not being able to afford nutritious food, and missing meals and suffering hunger. A survey from Statistics Canada shows that in 2017-2018, 11.1 per cent of the population of Quebec was food insecure, with 2.3 per cent experiencing severe food insecurity.

Numerous campus groups have been established to help foster the creation of an autonomous, ethical, and sustainable food system at Concordia. The People’s Potato, The Hive, and Le Frigo Vert each provided free or affordable meals to students as well as community members in downtown Montreal.

Faced with the challenge of providing food while abiding by the face of COVID regulations, however, emergency food baskets have emerged as a way to ensure the health and subsistence of students and community members, even at a distance.

Concordia’s food groups have adapted to the COVID context, according to Fabre. Since March, Innovation Jeunes and the CFC have joined forces to distribute hundreds of emergency food baskets containing locally and sustainably produced, nutritious foods every week.

Fabre explains that, due to COVID, organizations that serve marginalized populations in Montreal have not been able to provide the same housing or meal services as they once did. Since housing and feeding people is usually done in close proximity to people, the subsequent reduced scope of emergency services across Montreal has left countless individuals without their basic needs for survival, including food.

“Right now, [with] these food initiatives, I feel like we’re just kind of scrambling to plug in the holes in our food system,” said Fabre.

She emphasizes the importance of collaboration by groups at Concordia to confront this problem. “It’s brought a lot more collaboration between organizations that have very similar missions or seek to address some of the same issues. […] I’ve really noticed a lot of collaboration between food initiatives around the city and locally at Concordia,” she said.

For instance, Fabre noted People’s Potato has reopened its food bank by operating out of Le Frigo Vert, which isn’t technically on campus.

Plugging these holes in our food system is only made possible through the work of many dedicated volunteers and coordinators. If you need assistance or are interested in getting involved with the Concordia Food Coalition, or any other food group at Concordia, head to https://concordiafoodgroups.ca/ for a comprehensive list.
The thing is, I was running late. That's why I had an unbuckled pot of butternut squash soup in the passenger seat of my car. That's why I was speeding. When the car ahead brake checked me, I slammed on mine. The soup was dripping from the dashboard and pooling on the mat. The radio urged me “don't worry, be happy.” There was still some left in the pot. I leaned on the horn and thought that it could be an appetizer instead of an entrée. Don't worry, be happy. I sang along and put the rest of the pot on the floor. I was determined to enjoy the potluck, despite the spill. Besides, It was almost winter, so if I let it sit awhile it would freeze over and be easier to chip out. That would be better than scrubbing. Don't worry. Now I had a funny anecdote to share when I arrived. Be happy. Everyone would laugh, and for a moment, I'd forget about the soup in my car.

A few weeks later, I learned that it's illegal to hang air fresheners from rear-view mirrors, but I didn't worry. I prefer the smell of squash.

Curtis McRae

My mother has never said she loves me. I don't remember the last time we hugged each other. She was never taught to be emotionally expressive. Having grown up in a small rural village in China, my mom was educated in ways that are vastly different from how I grew up. I was born and raised in Quebec, and it took me a while to understand that love was expressed differently in our family.

My mom never said she loves me, but she always cooks for me. When I was younger, my mom and I would often fight. She would never be the one to apologize or explain anything, and she never came to comfort me when I would cry. However, she would always tell me to come and get food, even if she was really mad. “The rice is ready,” she would say.

When I moved out, she never told me she missed me, but would always ask me if I had enough rice and if she could drop some by. I have learned to read her signs now; it is through this rice that she tells me she loves me. It is through this rice that she finds herself able to warm her way into my life. A good bowl of white rice will always remind me of her and our family.

Sheena Macmillan

I love pandesal with all my heart. It's a fluffy roll coated in breadcrumbs usually served for breakfast either on its own or dipped in tsokolate. But everyone has their own way of eating it.

Growing up, going to Filipino parties should have broadened my palette, except I was a picky eater. My half-white, half-Filipino self was overwhelmed by the scents and flavours presented on the dinner table—they were so different from what I ate at home. These were special occasion foods, leagues and bounds more complex than the sandwiches I usually found comfort in.

In comes my godmother, my mama Dea. She bakes the best pandesal. Soft on the inside and golden brown on the outside. I would eat a half dozen in a single sitting while my ates and kuyas focused more on the pancit and lechon.

Ate means older sister and kuya means older brother, but both are used to show respect to those a few years older than you. Pancit is a noodle dish and lechon is a whole roasted pig—both foods are integral to any celebration.

When I think of comfort food, I think of my mama Dea’s pandesal. Even after several of my own attempts, I can never get them exactly like how she does it.

Even if she did follow a specific recipe, I bet she’d still keep it a secret—all to keep the magic in her well-loved pandesal.

Jessica Wu
**Verdura: A history of sharing**

The role of Italian gardens in forming community

Matilda Cerone

The first time my grandparents grew tomatoes in Montreal, they planted them in a vase kept by someone’s sister-in-law on the opposite side of the city. Despite the distance, these tomatoes symbolized sharing, an intrinsic aspect of my grandparents’ community, made up of other compatriots.

As decades passed following their arrival in Canada in the late ‘50s, these Italians respected their roots and cultivated their relationships through the produce they grew and shared.

After 15 years in this new country, these immigrants, most of them tailors and construction workers from small towns in rural Italy, had finally established their Canadian life. They were married, had become parents, and purchased homes—all in the neighbourhood of Saint-Michel.

They were now ready to embark on different projects, things that were primarily pleasant and not totally necessary. So my grandparents and their closest friends decided to buy a few plots of land in Terrebonne toward the end of the ‘60s.

On Sundays, these four couples would drive their children from church to their shack, bringing a few lamb steaks, to spend this day of rest together. After a week of work and school, these families did not want to eat Sunday lunch—an inviolable Italian tradition—alone at home.

On those plots, the kids played outside and bathed in a (very dirty) stream of water while the adults barbecued, chatted, and drank a few bottles of their homemade red wine.

They also used this land to grow produce: lettuce, potatoes, beans—and lots of tomatoes, emphasized my grandmother, Colomba Cerone.

“It was so fatiguing!” she recalled, laughing. “But we were young; you don’t feel the tiredness when you are young, unlike now.”

Yet, the beauty of the plants and the resources they provided encouraged them to keep going. The harvest fed these families throughout the summer and during the colder months, as surplus greens and tomatoes filled their freezers.

Ten years later, my grandparents and their friends sold those plots. Those Sundays came to an end, yet the sharing did not. Still, today, those four families exchange vegetables with one another and with other Italians.

In his garden, my grandfather Giuseppe Cerone grows incredible zucchini, though they do not blossom. Yet, just one house over, there is a garden
Top: Giuseppe Cerone reaches his hand to pick an apple from his tree on September 20 in Montreal, Canada.

Bottom: Attilio Cerone picks green beans from a neighbouring land plot in the Arthur-Pelosquin community garden on September 27 in Montreal, Canada.

Photos Matilda Cerone
full of delicate, yellow zucchini flowers. However, the owner of that garden, 94-years-old Venerina, does not know how to cook them.

So, when my grandmother lets herself into her friend’s garden to pick these flowers, she leaves a few zucchini on the doorstep. Once back at home, she fills these flowers with anchovies and mozzarella, covers them in batter, and deep fries them. Once ready, a few containers of these delicacies will be traded with other friends and neighbours for grapes, blackberries, squash es, or salad.

My grandparents are both from Collelongo, a small village at the foothills of a mountain in central Italy. Colomba arrived in Montreal first, following her newlywed sister, and asked Giuseppe to come to Canada and get married. In turn, he brought his younger brother, Attilio. The two siblings and their families ended up in two separate friend circles, despite their children often playing together.

Attilio did not join my grandparents’ efforts in Terrebonne, but grew his vegetables in his or his brother-in-law’s garden. After his wife passed away, around a decade ago, he decided to sell his family house and move into a basement apartment. As he abandoned his famous blackberry bushes and pear trees, his friends encouraged him to rent a plot of land at the Arthur-Péloquin community garden.

This garden is a hub of elderly Italians, most of them widows and widowers. During the summer, they meet in the morning as they pick vegetables and weed their plots. After a few complaints about how their backs hurt, they agree to meet later that night to play bocce and cards. Around 6 p.m., they are all gathered around a white plastic table in the middle of the garden.

“Women bring cookies and cakes, men open a bottle of wine, and there is a woman who brings pizza—oh, she makes such good pizza!” said Attilio, recalling these memories.

As he walks me around this garden, explaining which plot belongs to whom, he suddenly stops and asks me if I like fagiolini. I barely nod and he is already filling my tiny saddle bag with green beans from a random plot. “Are you sure you can do this?” I asked. He laughs and gesticulates, implying that I am being too uptight.

“She never picks them, and they end up being too hard,” he answered.

After almost 50 years, this summer was Attilio’s last gardening season. He has celebrated his 85th birthday, and his knees have become increasingly unforgiving of the long hours spent bent over plants.

The rest of my family is sceptical: Attilio was always quite irresponsible when it comes to health and safety, and he only got worse with age.

If he does stop, he will not be left empty-handed. Between Giuseppe’s swiss chard, Colomba’s tomatoes, and beans from all of his friends, his pantry is full.
Top: Attilio Cerone looks at the unripe tomatoes on his land plot in the Arthur-Pietroquin community garden on September 27 in Montreal, Canada.

Middle: Colomba Cerone lets tomatoes from her garden ripen near a window on September 20 in Montreal, Canada.

Bottom: Colomba Cerone prepares sauce with tomatoes from her garden on September 27 in Montreal, Canada.

Photos Matilda Cerone
Two Food Photographers Make ‘Food Porn’ of the Montreal Food Scene

How a schoolteacher from southwest Ireland became a most-wanted food photographer

April Tardif Levesque @AprilTardif

Alison Slattery directs the lens behind Montreal’s renowned @TwoFoodPhotographers Instagram account. She takes photos for many Montreal restaurants, sometimes for the menu and promotional materials, and other times working on projects such as the True North cookbook and the long-awaited Mandy’s Gourmet Salads cookbook.

Down to earth despite a following of over 10,000, 39-year-old Slattery has a disclaimer: despite the name of the business, she is the photographer behind the account. Her business partner, Farah Khan, is now a busy graphic designer with her own business, House9 Design.

The duo photographed weddings together before shooting food. Slattery remembers the gruelling day of a wedding photographer, emphasizing the long hours, fatigue, and pressure.

Slattery chose to keep the name when Khan decided to focus on her graphic design business, given its success on Instagram.

“I think I really just hit Instagram at a great time [when] […] the word ‘food porn’ came into the world,” said Slattery. “I hate that word, but you know what I mean. Food wasn’t always like this, it became the Instagrammable thing. Maybe it was before me, but it definitely helped me ride the wave when I started.”

Slattery’s photography style is bright, colourful, and meant to entice the viewer to want to eat the food portrayed. The proof is in the Instagram feed; it takes less than a minute to feel a Pavlovian reaction. Slattery credits the beautiful photos to years of practice.

“I found my style; I just went with it!” she said. When other accounts use Slattery’s work without tagging her, many people already know that she took the photograph, something Slattery is proud of.

This recognition got her some contracts after volunteering to take photos for a food writer once a week.

“I had written to Élise [Tastet], who had started Tastet,” she recounted. “I was like ‘I have no food portfolio, can I work with you for like a year and build one up?’”

The pair would go to a restaurant and sample some bestsellers for the Tastet site, and Slattery would shoot photos. She said the restaurants would see the pictures and ask Tastet for Slattery’s contact info—some inviting her back to shoot the entire menu to use on social media.

One challenge many Instagram users face is taking photos of delicious food that may not necessarily look appetizing in photos. This is small potatoes for Slattery.

“I’m not going to name restaurants, because everyone’s trying to survive right now,” she said. “But I did take pictures a couple of years ago, where people knew the food wasn’t great, but the pictures made the food look great.”

“Let’s be honest, if you’ve got a good camera and a good setup, you could take street food,” she said. “Street food is delicious, it could look nasty, but you could just do a setup, and it could look unbelievable.”

“The shots that go on Instagram, sometimes, are nasty. People take them with their flash at nighttime or videos that get really close; the stuff sometimes looks like manure on a plate. But you know it’s good because of where they are. They’ve just done something injustice because it’s flash in a dark environment.”

Slattery prefers taking her photos in the daytime to avoid situations like this. Khan, however, interjected to say it’s really about being intentional.

“I think you can take a beautiful photo in just about any circumstance, with just about any piece of technology or camera, but you just have to be very aware of the limitations and possibilities, of your technology and of your surroundings,” she said.

“I’ve been using the same equipment for a while. I used to make money from wedding photography for a couple of years, during which I bought equipment, lenses, cameras,” she said.

“I recently purchased the Nikon D850 and I barely use it because I’m still in love with the first one, the D800. I feel like I’m going to just keep going with it until it gives out on me.”
7 Food Photography Tips
BY ALISON S L A T T E R Y
#practice practice practice

1. I prefer to use natural light so I always shoot by a window. I often use a reflector opposite the window to help bounce the light. You can always use a white sheet of paper or white cardboard.

2. Never ask for free food. Not even in exchange for photos. Restaurants are struggling right now more than ever.

3. By default, unless you sign over your rights, you always own copyright to your photos under Canadian law.

4. Try to shoot in manual settings, you'll get to learn your camera more!

5. Angles are important. Walk around the plate or the table. Never stand in one spot the entire shoot.

6. Experiment with depth of field.

7. And finally always try to develop your own style.

She has three cameras now. Her tone shifts to one of grave warning as she describes the perils of being limited to one piece of equipment.

“The one thing you know is when you send it into that shop it’s gone for at least a month,” she said.

No job is perfect, but Slattery and Khan said their clients are amazing.

“Working with chefs and restaurants is a dream because they love what they do so much,” said Khan. “They understand what it’s like to be an artist, so they’re very trusting of us.”

“And they know that your photos are their recipes,” Slattery added.

Khan said in any service-based work, reputation is the most important thing. “It’s really a fine balance of how to stand up for yourself while maintaining relationships.”

Slattery described some of the most memorable projects, and some came as no surprise.

“The Mandy’s cookbook was incredible!” Slattery recounted. “They were absolutely dream clients and wonderful women as well. Derek at Maison Publique is also amazing to work with. Tastet has been great to work with. I have met so many restaurants and people and stories through that job. That was my first, and I’m still doing it four years later.”

Slattery described discovering new restaurants through clients and networks she built over time as a spiderweb. She emphasized the importance of Instagram for networking, through which she receives more messages than through the website.

She seems to still be amazed by how this dream job is now her job. “It is the best job I’ve ever had,” she said. “It’s a job that so many people covet. It’s crazy!”

Slattery went from teaching in Ireland to teaching in South Korea, where she bought her first camera. When she moved to Montreal, she realized she would have to go back to school to teach in Quebec—costly for an international student. Rusty with her French, Slattery worked in daycares and as a nanny for a few years, practicing photography as a hobby.

She described shooting images of children at the daycare and eventually scoring contracts from families to take photos for them.

“I don’t think I can charge you because I don’t think I’m good enough,” she remembered feeling. “That was a huge battle I went through for years, feeling that I wasn’t good enough. I couldn’t call myself a professional, that word seemed so strong that it scared me.”

Slattery didn’t start off knowing how to take the photos she takes today. She would be carrying a piece of paper with reminders about camera settings and would have to practice regularly so as not to forget.

“If I can do it, coming from southwest Ireland to a different country and changing jobs, anyone can do this,” she said.

“I’m all self-taught. Yet here I am.”

Alison Slattery photographs a scene for an upcoming project. Courtesy Farah Khan
HOW TO STEAL FROM GROCERY CHAINS

We all rely on grocery workers, but they average less than $15 an hour, so when the pandemic hit, Provigo, Metro, IGA, and other grocery giants introduced hero pay—$2 extra—to great PR acclaim.

Still, even in the era of hoarding toilet paper, grocery chains just couldn’t afford it, so they discarded the bonus like so many pounds of unsold food.

Here are some ways people steal from major grocery stores. Don’t do these things.

1) Shop using your reusable bag. Expensive items, such as bricks of cheese, go in the bottom. Simply forget to take them out at the cash register.

2) Don’t look up too much for cameras and staff; you’ll tip someone off.

3) Forget to ring something in at the self-checkout.

4) Self-checkout again—this time, take a weighted item but select a less expensive product.

5) Snack as you shop—oldest trick in the book.

Did you know the market cap of Loblaw Companies Limited is $23.7 billion?

Seriously, though, don’t do it. Galen Weston might cut off your hand.
Burlesque to Boletes: Foraging for Peace and Mushrooms

How burlesque star Lavender May reconnected with a side of herself (and invented puffball poutine)

Marcus Bankuti @marcusbankuti

When Lavender May saw a picture of herself mushroom hunting, she laughed so hard she cried. She was head-to-toe in drab blue, save for her shabby, mud-stained running shoes, backwards camo cap, and a canvas bag hanging like a bindle from a long stick on her shoulder. “I laughed so hard because I don’t recognize this girl,” she said.

The woman in the photograph is far from the one who reigns over the glitzy world of Montreal burlesque. A veteran of the stage, the 29-year-old has opened for AC/DC and been named the city’s best burlesque performer three years running in Cult MTL’s Best of Nightlife rankings.

As a performer, May projects dazzling confidence. Her costumes, often scintillating, can be opulent even when made from scraps of broken necklaces and brooches. When her outfits border on outlandish, she retains an immutable feminine glamour.

She has toured Europe, performing at events such as the London Burlesque Festival, the continent’s biggest. Until this spring, she could most often be found at Old Montreal’s Bord’Elle, where she is often accompanied on stage by an aerialist.

While May was able to return to live performances for a time, Bord’Elle is again closed due to COVID restrictions.

When Montreal first descended into lockdown due to the pandemic, May embraced virtual shows but missed the energy of a real audience. “Having a response is part of burlesque,” she said. “Making people react.”

Without all the excitement of show business, May found herself in a reflective mood. She watched old videos and appreciated how far she’s come as an artist. Yet, she found the need to reconnect with another side of herself, a side she associates with the name her parents gave her.

“I need to take care of Marie-Sophie, not just Lavender May,” she said.

May grew up visiting her parents’ cabin outside of Trois-Rivières. She never realized the pines of Saint-Boniface were packed with mushrooms until this summer, when her boyfriend developed an interest after going mushroom hunting with his dad.

The couple tried foraging on their own and started by picking everything—a beginner’s mistake, May said. Still, their confidence grew as they immersed themselves in online forums and identified many edible boletes.

“We went every week, and I was really excited,” May said. “I was dreaming about mushrooms. I was dreaming about mushroom hunting. When I’m at the cottage, I can’t

Courtesy Samantha Briand
May, also a producer and costume designer, traces her career back to her days of making prom dresses for other girls in high school. It wasn’t until she discovered burlesque that she realized this is what she had been making all along.

She grew up in Deux-Montagnes, but she knew her crowd was in cosmopolitan Montreal. She was working at a vintage clothing store in the Plateau 10 years ago when burlesque performer Tigerrr Lili approached her to perform in her show. Before long, May had immersed herself in the city’s burlesque scene, making costumes and selling her creations at festivals. “For me, it’s a way of expressing myself,” she said.

“She’ll have flights of fantasy,” said fellow performer and former roommate Lady Josephine, who owns the Arabesque Burlesque dance studio.

Josephine recalls a trailer to promote Cake fête, a birthday show May produced in 2015 when the two lived together. “It just meant that we all had to dress up as naked Marie Antoinette and throw cake at each other. She just fully decorated our living room and had everything set up with a camera crew, and it was just so extra, and it was really fun.”

May has not always been so confident, she said. She recalls her first solo performance, at a restaurant, as a lesson in humility.

“I was selling cotton candy and nobody wanted to buy any from me, so I would throw all my cotton candy into the crowd and get naked,” she said. “That was my concept. But people were not expecting to get cotton candy in their spaghetti.” The crowd had been muted as her song’s lyrics—“It’s oh so quiet. Shh! Shh! It’s oh so still”—resonated in the dining room.

Even at the peak of her career, there can still be challenges. At Bord’Elle, a 1920s-themed bar and restaurant where she most often performs, diners are not always prepared for her brand of neo-burlesque—a genre that can incorporate LED lights, extra-terrestrials, and Star Trek.

“Sometimes people are just like, ‘Oh, what is she doing? Oh my God, she’s taking her clothes off,’” she said.

“Even after 10 years, it still happens. That’s what I tell my students all the time. Don’t. Give. A. fuck,” she said. “[…] Don’t wait for the applause.”

Still, the crowd’s reaction fuels May’s love of the

“WHEN YOU’RE IN NATURE, YOU FORGET ALL OF THIS HAPPENING, AND YOU NEED TO DO THIS AT SOME POINT. YOU NEED TO FEEL FREE FROM THIS PANDEMIC.”
— LAVENDER MAY
stage. She gets her kicks from making people laugh. Burlesque, at its core, has always been about humour and exaggeration, she said. “How extraordinary is it to make people react just by taking a glove off?”

The COVID shutdowns have forced us to look at our identities, said Josephine. “It’s really lovely to see [May] digging deeper into Marie-Sophie, who has always loved nature,” she said. “I’ve been to her parents’ cabin with her, and it’s a beautiful place.” Another friend, a fellow mushroom hunter who visited the cabin, described the surrounding woods as a “mushroom paradise.”

“You have to be open and let the mushroom spirit guide you through the forest,” said May. Still, foraging cannot be taken lightly. Mushrooms can be dangerous, even deadly, and many varieties can look alike.

“My boyfriend is the one who decides what we eat and what we don’t eat,” said May. “He’s the one that is more mature and wise. Me, I’m like, ‘It’s going to be fine.’ He’s like, ‘No. No, no, no.’ That’s something his Dad taught him: Be humble.”

On the mycology groups she’s found online, the community doesn’t like when people simply ask if a mushroom is edible. It’s important to take the time to understand the classifications and nuances of identifying species. “There are a lot of people that are poisoned by mushrooms every year,” she said. “It’s not a joke.”

The pines surrounding her parents’ cabin are nevertheless rich with many safe varieties. May finds the parasitic lobster mushroom particularly interesting, but her favourite is the marshmallow-like puffball. It even inspired a culinary innovation: the puffball poutine.

“I’m definitely trademarking this if you put this in your article,” she said. “It’s definitely my idea. That was delicious.”

Diving in head first is nothing new for May. Josephine recalls May becoming obsessed with organization when they lived together. “It was like weeks of separating boxes of beads and nails and safety pins and sparkles and rhinestones all mixed together, but then in that project she was just as focused and meticulous as in her art-making,” she said. “So I just remember seeing her shift into this extreme organizer. And then, invariably, it got messy again.”

Josephine describes May as a true artist, saying she’s seen how a dream or a spark of an idea can launch her friend into a flurry of creation.

It’s no surprise May’s new passion has found its way into her art. She finally completed an Alice in Wonderland on magic mushrooms concept she started in her first year performing. The time she’s spent in nature has also inspired a brand new show, which will be centred on ocean projections. “I want to make people more aware of the disappearance of the coral reef with a burlesque act,” she said.

While May looks forward to a return to normalcy, Montreal’s descent into the red zone this fall has muddied the path forward for burlesque in Montreal.

May was in the late stages of putting together a troupe called Les Amuse Girls when the city shut down in March. She worries a commitment to burlesque could wane for some, but she comforts herself with the knowledge that there are others like her—truly passionate.

“She really has a lust for life,” said Josephine, “grabbing everything she can get and building life as art. Artist who lives their life as artist—I think she really embodies that.”
Food and Me: Enemies to Lovers

A personal journey to rebuild a relationship broken by athletics

Jordan Mckay @ jordanmckayyy

I began swimming competitively at age six after my failed attempts at gymnastics and soccer.

I wasn’t a star. I was a chubby kid who had a knack for keeping herself up in the water and a strange love for the fast-paced sport. It made my heart race and left me breathless.

At that age, I had little concern for nutrition or health, but the coaches made sure our parents knew what they needed when they packed our lunches for swim meets. Goldfish crackers were a no-no in my house. My friends ate goldfish crackers and fruit roll-ups, and I ate fruit and granola bars.

Swim meets were for pasta dinners, granola bars, Gatorade, and peanut butter toast. There was no room for negotiation. As young athletes, we needed fuel to replace the calories we burned in the 10-plus hours a week of practice. Goldfish crackers were not fuel.

I was a fat kid, chronically overweight, with a big belly of baby fat. It didn’t matter that I ate and trained the same as my siblings. At age eleven, I was very aware of this fact. It may have been a reason why I was placed in the B group that year. I took it as a personal challenge and pushed myself harder in practice. I forced my body past its breaking point and left that group with sciatica and a wrist injury.

I made the A group the following year. My conscious issues with food and body image began that year as well. The girls in my group were thinner and taller. I slowly started to skip out on the snacks my mum had carefully packed for me. I pretended I wasn’t hungry, but I was still overweight.

When it came to swimming, however, I was having a fantastic year. I got medals, and I placed better than ever. I didn’t know it at the time, but that year would be the last good year I had in the sport. I’d reached my peak.

I thought the following year was going to be my best yet. I was riding the high from the previous year and competing as one of the oldest in my age category, which was bound to give me an advantage. I began limiting myself to one snack during the day and one after practice. It was a foolproof plan to lose the stomach fat I thought I had; I was finally going to be an average weight at the doctor’s office.

I told my parents I no longer liked pasta and ate smaller portions. Throughout that year and some of the others that followed, I remember wishing I had the willpower to starve myself. I hated myself for those thoughts, but they crept in anyways.

I ended up switching sports due to a shoulder injury. I jumped from training around 10 hours a week to more than 20. In the year and a half I spent playing water polo, I would argue I was the fittest I had ever been in my life; I weighed in at 150 pounds, which my doctor reminded me was overweight for a girl five feet five inches tall.

In the end, it was the same shoulder injury with no promising treatment that took me out of competitive sport forever.

Food became my frenemy. I needed it to survive, so I ate it and occasionally gorged myself on it. In my last two years as an athlete, I gave up snacking during the day, limited my portions, and skipped meals far more than necessary. And yet I still found myself binge eating the same foods I avoided.

In the year following the end of my athletics career, my relationship with food worsened. As a busy CEGEP student, meals of convenience worked best at school. I gave up lunches altogether and instead ate a single granola

“The number on the scale will no longer define me. I will no longer deny my body the food it needs. I will work to better my relationship with food every day for the rest of my life.”

– Jordan Mckay
bar. I would go a whole week without eating a proper lunch only to gorge myself on all the food my parents had limited when I was younger.

I gained weight, so I started to restrict my dinner. I didn’t go for seconds even if I was still hungry and stopped eating as much junk food, but nothing helped. At 18, I weighed in at roughly 170 pounds.

I joined a gym and went at least three times a week. I started meal prepping. But my doctor still insisted on testing me for diabetes and heart disease.

Apparently, gaining 20 pounds in two years isn’t healthy. It didn’t matter if I was eating a calorie deficit or if I starved myself—the weight wasn’t going anywhere.

Diet culture would have you believe that certain foods are bad for you. Fitness culture would have you think that calorie counting and intermittent fasting are healthy ways of looking at food. Fat shammers make you believe that weight loss is simply about willpower and motivation. I’ve found that all three are horrendously misinformed.

The number on the scale will no longer define me. I will no longer deny my body the food it needs. I will work to better my relationship with food every day for the rest of my life.

There’s no easy way to change the habits I’ve developed after years of weight propaganda. My relationship with food may forever be damaged. I may still shame myself into skipping meals only to binge cereal the following day. I may even restrict my portions and check the calories on my snacks. Eating healthy isn’t just making the switch to salads but making a conscious decision, every day, to treat your body with the respect and food it needs.

Some days are worse than others lately, but I’m working on it.
Filipino cuisine bears undeniable similarities to the cooking styles of its neighboring countries, and that’s not by accident. Look to the Philippines’ complicated colonial past, and you’ll find the roots to many of the country’s most famous dishes.

A pre-colonial Philippines

Like many Asian countries, rice is the foundation to the Filipino food pyramid. The staple crop was brought over to Cagayan Valley, the north-most point of the Philippines, during an Indo-Malaysian, Chinese, and Vietnamese wave of migration in around 3400 BC.

Over 3000 years later, give or take a few hundred, China began to trade regularly with the Philippines. This introduced soy sauce, fish sauce, and stir-frying to their cooking arsenal. What followed was a beautiful thing—the creation of dishes like pancit, siopao, and lumpia. The Filipino response to chow mein, cha siu bao, and spring rolls.

Pancit is a noodle dish with stir-fried meat and vegetables that is eaten best in overloaded spoonfuls. The Filipino version of a steamed pork bun, siopao, has the perfect ratio between fluffy bun and sweet pork filling. When it comes to lumpia, nothing can go wrong with a deep fried spring roll.

As the Philippines began to trade with India, Malaysia, and Indonesia, dishes like kare-kare started to emerge as the Filipino interpretation of curry. Kare-kare is a stew with a rich peanut sauce, traditionally made with oxtail.

This all happened before Spain ever set foot in the Philippines—yet they hold such a vice grip on the country’s palette.

Who are these white men and why can’t I eat with my hands?

Before Ferdinand Magellan arrived in the Philippines in 1521, it was tradition to eat kamayan style, meaning to eat with your hands, typically with banana leaves as placemats. The Spanish introduced eating with utensils to wean Filipinos away from their supposed “barbarism.” The practice was adopted for special occasions, especially when eating with Spaniards.

As time went on, however, using a fork and knife fell out of style. Now you’ll find Filipinos eating with a spoon and fork—it’s simply more practical. If you disagree, go eat rice with a fork and knife and report back with how efficient that was.
Buffet spread my cousin’s second birthday in Libertad, Isabel, Leyte, Philippines in 1992. Courtesy Roche family
While the colonizer’s method of eating didn’t last, their culinary influence did. Some food historians claim that 80 per cent of Filipino dishes have Spanish roots. Because the colonizers were the upper echelon of society, many dishes adapted by upper-class Filipinos also took inspiration from the Spanish.

The origin story behind one of the most iconic Filipino foods is unclear, but some believe it was a mix of existing tradition and Spanish flavour that created lechon as we know it today.

Sitting at the head of the table on a massive dish lined with countless layers of aluminum foil, lechon is a whole roasted pig known for its juicy meat and crispy golden brown skin. It’s essential to any family gathering.

A dish scarcely found on buffet tables but always in a nondescript container in the fridge, is adobo. Something about adobo just reminds me of a Wednesday evening at home—it’s nothing crazy, but it’s always nice. Adobo is usually chicken marinated in vinegar, soy sauce, and spices—but there’s no rules against other proteins. Pre-colonial Filipinos had no qualms against fish, meat, or veggies cooked adobo style. In fact, marinating the food in vinegar was a way to preserve it.

When the Spanish saw this traditional way of cooking, they decided to slap a Spanish name on it and call it a day.

Their nearly 400 year-long colonization of the Philippines also left behind some honourable mentions like chicharon (fried pork rinds), leche flan (caramel custard), and empanadas.
Who are these white men and why do they all have a God complex?

A revolt was brewing, and the kettle boiled over in 1896 in the shape of the Philippine Revolution. The revolution ended in 1898, when Spain passed their control of the Philippines over to the Americans. The Philippines would only gain independence in 1946.

Besides Westernizing the education system, making English the official language of business, and turning the Philippines’ top export into its people, the American occupation created one of my favourite things to order at the Filipino fast food chain Jollibee—Filipino spaghetti.

As the Americans dug their feet into Philippine soil, they brought canned goods like tomato ketchup with them. During the Second World War, tomato ketchup was hard to come by. Tomatoes didn’t grow well in the Philippines, so changes needed to be made to satisfy the ketchup craving. Looking to the heavens for answers, they saw plentiful banana trees—a fruit that thrives in the humid weather.

María Orosa, a food technologist, connected the dots and invented banana ketchup.

Pair the sweetness of the banana ketchup with the savouriness of spaghetti and you get the beginnings of a contemporary Filipino staple. If you don’t have banana ketchup in the pantry, you can hit the right flavour profile by adding sugar to your meat sauce. So cook up some hot dogs, noodles, and sauce, and lament the absence of a Jollibee in Montreal.

Why would you occupy us? We made dessert together

Before Japan utterly ransacked the Philippines during WWII, the two countries made nice and traded with each other.

Based on the Japanese kakigori, a dessert comprised of shaved ice and sweet beans, the Filipino remix took off in the 1900s when ice and refrigeration became more readily available. The earliest versions featured cooked red beans or mung beans in crushed ice with sugar and milk, but as more native ingredients were added we got to how halo-halo is made today.

Halo-halo translates to “mix-mix,” which tells you everything you need to know. The dessert contains a multitude of ingredients, and it changes depending on the region. Most commonly, it’s made with crushed ice, evaporated milk, purple sweet potato, sweetened beans, coconut strips, palm stems, gelatin, boiled taro, flan (colonial crossover!), and a scoop of ice cream.

It doesn’t sound like those components would work well together, but they do.

While the Philippines’ colonial history is the root to many of the country’s problems today, it’s worth remembering that life goes on. Life went on for our ancestors, and we still eat like them today. Their traditions endured, even after three different foreign powers claiming rule over the country. Filipinos took the colonial influences, added some local seasoning, and re-appropriated them into something amazing. So pull out a spoon and fork, and let’s celebrate our history.

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**HALO-HALO**

*From*

**CUISINE DE MANILLE IN CÔTE-DES-NEIGES**

**LUMPIA**

*From*

**LA REPUBLIKA IN CÔTE-DES-NEIGES**

**PANCIT**

*From*

**BECK’S FILIPINO CUISINE IN DOLLARD-DES-ORMEAUX**

**SIOPAO**

*From*

**FIESTA PILIPINO IN CÔTE-DES-NEIGES**

**EXPERIENCE A KAMAYAN FEAST**

*At JUNIOR IN LITTLE BURGUNDY*
In my dreams, fresh ramen noodles strangle Po Po in her sleep. Thick and chewy, the flour-based noodles wrap around her neck and squeeze tight till her snoring is silenced. The tonkotsu broth rises from the floorboards with nori appearing like clouds above me. My tears turn into minced pork that falls upon bamboo shoots.

I wake up in a sweat with soy sauce lingering on my tongue, its fermentation making it taste alcoholic. Throwing the sheets off, I race to the bathroom and stare in the mirror, slap my chubby cheeks, and wonder if a ghost followed me around.

“Morning,” mother says as she pours hot coffee out for us all.

My father attempts conversation, but I just grab the cup and go.

I do not take cream in my coffee; sugar is out too. They’re great in other things but not in my coffee, which has notes of blueberries in the aftertaste.

In my messy room there is a cookbook staring at me from the corner. Propped up on a few unread novels is the Yan Can Cookbook, a mainstay of my father’s kitchen expertise. I have never read it, not a single page.

The eyes of Yan fill me with shame as he asks if I can cook. I do cook, I cook a lot, I have delved deep into recipe books to find delicious treats within. Yet I stray far away from my roots, far away from Yan. The closest I have been is to Hong Kong. That is not to say I dislike food from where my family comes from—well, half of it.

I grew up putting soy sauce on eggs and oyster sauce and sesame in my noodles, and I believe my heart tastes like the deep crimson barbecue pork that you see in Chinese butchers’ shops.

Yet shame fills my glazed heart and I set Yan on his back, so he stares at the ceiling with an eternal smile.

I am a mix of Chinese and Eastern European, I eat all things. I feel guilty, though, when I enjoy a hot bowl of ramen in the middle of a frigid Canadian winter.

School is but a short trip on the Green Line and I sip at yet another black coffee. This wakes me
up, the beans are burnt and bitter, but it is what I need now. I think back on the dream and feel the scorching liquid envelope me again, but I push it to the back burner.

Out of penance, during my break, I walk a few blocks and get a red bean bun as if that would ease the relationship I never had with Po Po, my grandmother who used to give me red envelopes filled with money. I would say thank you, but I always wondered if she knew that I meant it. She taught me how to use chopsticks, and I used that knowledge to slurp ramen noodles.

My grandmother was born in China and fled her village from a wave of violence, fleeing all the way to England, where she would pass away decades later. I could not attend the funeral.

The thought burns in my mind as I walk back to school stomach rumbling, even as I munch on the sweet earthy bun. The dark red follows me wherever I go. I do not know if it is good luck or mocking threats.

The violence that had plagued my grandmother did not exist in the food I ate. It existed in memory, or at least that is what I began telling myself every day. I would pass my favorite place to eat and avoid it like it pointed guns at me. The staff stared curiously at a boy they only knew as a customer run off like a scared fox when they saw me through the glass.

For weeks, fear gripped my heart, but one night when fresh noodles were once again strangling my Po Po, I saved her. I pulled them off and dragged her body to the top of the soup bowl and I could see floating fish cakes.

When I awoke, it was still night. The sun was far from rising and the sky an endless black expanse, like a starless sheet. I sat in my bed and stared at my hands. I tried to hold invisible chopsticks. I twirled noodles that did not exist.

When I looked up, I swallowed the salt of soy sauce, and my heart pounded. My grandmother sat at the foot of my bed holding a bowl of rice.

The sun sprinted into the sky and the birds chirped like static.

She said nothing to me as I bowed my head in guilt.

“I’m sorry.”

She didn’t answer and disappeared—leaving me alone in the night once more.

I drank my coffee when I awoke and ate an egg fried in bacon fat on white toast. My dad had learned that from his parents, my Po Po, and I remembered it.

When I bundled up for my commute, I thought about her cheeks that reminded me of my own. We were two chipmunks storing food for a winter that was very present.

Snow fell on my cheeks and I stomped my way through the ice in a long wool coat, hands buried deep in my pockets. A red scarf was around my neck, a gift from China given to my father but worn by me.

In my classes I felt my stomach dictate my mind, I am always hungry. I tried every restaurant in the area, but my mind seemed to be set on a bowl of ramen. Rich and savory it would be perfect after a long morning lugging around a coat and bag through the hallways, with squeaking boots.

Just outside the building, I let my breath cloud my eyes, and I walked towards the res-
taurant. Just a hop and a skip away across the street and down the precarious steps, I did not even listen to the welcome. I followed the waitress’s motion towards the last empty table. The menu was slapped in front of me and I briefly saw my reflection in the plastic. I set the menu down again and took off my coat.

I thought about my dad’s heavy-lidded eyes, which he inherited from both his parents. Yet my eyes were wide open. I saw the superficial feature and gritted my teeth wanting to scream. My eyes betrayed me; I was born shameful in my mind.

I missed the waitress completely, she stood over me with her notepad waiting. I felt the words catch in my throat as I felt the silent anger of history wash over me. I remembered in that moment the time my Po Po asked me if I would learn Chinese.

I said I would learn Japanese.

I wondered if I broke her heart that day.

I broke my own heart in that moment and simply apologized and left. My stomach growled angrily as I sat on a frozen bench. I didn’t even brush the snow off. I let it melt so my ass was cold and wet. I let the feeling sink in when I heard a sleepy voice.

“Hey, Frank.” Monica sat next to me and lit a cigarette. Thrusting her Bic lighter into her purse, she took a pull and looked at me. “Hungry?”

“Very,” I muttered.

“I thought you said you were going for ramen?”

“I’d rather sit on a bench right now.”

“I see,” she tapped out ash, “Wanna talk about the cold bench?”

I laughed. “No, not really.”

“Alright.” We sat in silence for a while, and she took another cigarette after burning the first all the way to the filter.

“Have you ever thought of quitting?” I asked without thinking.

“A lot of times, but I just can’t shake it. Not yet, anyways.”

“Yeah, I understand.”

“You can let things stay with you, but you have to approach it eventually. I’m stressed as it is. So, quitting smoking isn’t top of the list, you know?”

“Have I ever told you that I don’t make ma pao tofu with ginger?”

“I’ll be frank with you Frank, I don’t know what that is.”

“It’s a Chinese dish of ground beef and tofu and black beans.”

“Sounds delicious.”

“And easy,” I fidgeted with my hands. “Do you think my grandmother would scold me for not using ginger?”

Monica gave a sidewars glance and laughed, “Does it taste good?”

“Um, yeah.”

“There ya go, negative Nancy.”

I smiled and laughed, “I’m not negative, just worried.”

“Afraid of a ghost, are we?”

“Yes actually, a vengeful one.”
“Grandmothers are powerful beings, aren’t they?”
“Yeah they are. I think I need to have an honest chat with her.”
“You go do that; my smoke break is done.”
She left me alone on the bench. I decided to skip lunch that day.
When I fell asleep that night I did not dream of ramen. I dreamt of a block of tofu bathed in black bean sauce. It was fluffy and warm, so I sat down and waited for my ghost. She arrived in a thin sweater and red slippers. She shuffled along and I jumped to my feet. She had never seen me so tall and marveled at how I had grown. I sat her down next to me and we glanced at the sky that was like a porcelain bowl with painted clouds.

“Hey Po Po.” I hugged her tightly and smelled green onions in her hair.
“I never learned Japanese, haven’t learned Chinese either though so, umm, yeah.” I clasped my hands together. “I don’t want to apologize for what I said. I just want you to know that I understand what I said and hope you understand my non-understanding if that makes sense.”
She stared at the sky.
“Have you ever had ramen before?”
She shook her head.
“One moment.” I stood up and felt the tofu wobble. I dipped my hand into the ground and pulled a full bowl of ramen with all the fixings that appeared where the tofu had been. Chopsticks grew in my free hand and I handed both to Po Po.
It was my turn to stare at the sky.
I heard her slurp the soup and small “mmmms” could be heard. The smacking of lips and the quiet chewing bounced around the bowl we were sitting in. “I want to believe you’d like ramen; I don’t know if I could’ve gotten you to try it when you were still around. I like to believe, though. Good food is good food, and I want to share it with everyone. I hope you understand that I will always cook ma pao tofu, but I won’t make ramen. I only desire to eat it,” a sigh drifted from my lips. “I hope you understand Po Po.”
She finished the bowl and handed it to me. I placed it next to me and watched the painted clouds drift around the rim. I waited, not expecting an answer, and felt her prod my arm. In her hand was a red and gold envelope. I took it with a small bow and held it in my hands. When I opened it, I saw a simple message, “You add the right amount of garlic.”
I laughed and she laughed with me. I laughed till tears streamed from my face, before I knew it I was crying my eyes out. I awoke to my pillow soaked in tears.
They were salty, like soy sauce.
The pandemic saw a disproportionate number of women leave the workforce, leaving us decades behind and illustrating the gender dynamics still under the surface. Women, as we all know, are still charged with many common domestic tasks, such as laundry, childcare, and cooking.

While women have long been the keepers of cultural, culinary secrets, big-name chefs and personalities seem to be men. For a time, men made up a large portion of food writers as well, allowing them to narrate food culture and put women in a supporting role, despite women literally being the hand that feeds.

It would not shock me to hear of a male Michelin-star chef coming home, after a day of being a hotshot, to complain that his wife didn’t cook his favourite meal.

What I’m here to argue is that we place worth on what men do over what women do in most spheres of life, food included. When prominent publications axe lifestyle sections, it’s usually women affected. When we celebrate visionaries and culture catalysts in the food realm, how often are those people men? When they are women, how differently do we speak of them, write about them, or platform them?

If men have dominated the culinary scene for so long, it amazes me that more men do not cook at home. I think the leading reason is applause. Invisible tasks that serve a family are not met with accolades, but doing it for money and praise would be more enticing for men.

This highlights a gap between motives of labour, where emotional labour and labours of love are attributed to women, and paid and praised labour are attributed to men.

This is a disadvantage to women, to all the work that goes unseen but keeps society running, which men will co-opt for profit. It also negatively impacts men by saying there is something inherently useless or emasculating about doing invisible labour or doing things out of love for their family.

This same cultural mentality directs men to more well-paid technical fields over fields that involve helping others, whereas women are still over-represented and underpaid in service fields.

The idea of which deserves higher pay is also inherently based on overvaluing masculine roles, whereas society might be far less liveable or functional without the roles we undervalue and attribute to women. We have seen during this pandemic what types of essential services, normally underpaid, invisible, and perhaps women-dominated, help society run.

It also creates a situation where LGBTQ+ folks are forced to adapt to a gendered career choice or seek employment in fields that are safer for them. They also face employment discrimination at a potentially higher rate and this could be exacerbated by a male-dominated career that is considered more “masculine.”

Careers in food are no different, where professional kitchens and food celebrities are often men, and the domestic cooking sphere is held as a separate style, aimed at women.

If we could imagine a world without gendered value, we could all eat better, live better, and maybe decide our careers based on passion and not identity or economic status. We could benefit from placing more value and funding in less male-dominated spheres, as we see how important they are to society.

We all love food, so why not love everyone that loves to make it with the same energy?
Photos Marcus Bankuti
CHEAP GROCERY STORES FOR THE PROLETARIAT
WHERE TO FIGHT BIG GROCERY STORES IN MONTREAL

SEagal’s Market
4001 St. Laurent Blvd.

What’s so good about it: Widely regarded as the cheapest grocery store in town, Segal’s has been serving Montrealers on The Main since 1927. Shelves are always stacked with good quality produce, and they use cardboard boxes instead of plastic bags to carry out your groceries. The pungent smell of fish and long lines at the cash are just small prices to pay for a cheap and efficient grocery run.

Al-Mizan
1836-A Ste. Catherine St. W

What’s so good about it: Open until 10 p.m. every night, the grocery store is a fantastic place for bulk purchases, spices, international foods, spices, and a good selection of meat. They have a wonderful selection of halal products, and reviewers also appreciate the assortment of Middle Eastern imported goods and spices. The service is friendly and helpful, and the business is family-owned.

P.A. Supermarket
1420 Fort St.

What’s so good about it: With multiple locations around the city, P.A. offers the shopping experience of big supermarkets with customer-friendly prices. Products range from local produce to international ingredients and treats. It’s a good place to find cheap fruits and vegetables when they’re considered past their sell-by date, but still tasty. Make sure to visit earlier in the day, as it gets busy after 5 p.m.

Adonis
2173 Ste. Catherine St. W

What’s so good about it: Just a few blocks from Concordia’s downtown campus, this Adonis location is brimming with the widest range of products you can imagine at affordable prices. Their impressive cheese and charcuterie counters will keep you coming back, and the deli counter offers great meals and quick snacks that will keep both your tummy and your wallet happy.

Marché Akhavan
6170 Sherbrooke St. W

What’s so good about it: The perfect place to find Middle Eastern delicacies and great local products, Marché Akhavan has everything you need if you’re shopping for groceries in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce. From fresh olives to delicious baked goods like baklava, Akhavan has all the flavors you need at great prices.
Sharing a Meal — Across — Barrier Lines

Palestinian food’s vitality, prominence and growing ubiquity

Mzwandile Poncana @Mzwandilep

When Dana was six, her elementary school in Montreal hosted a cultural food-sharing day. When she eagerly brought a bowl of hummus to the event, an Israeli student in the same grade came up to her, grabbed it from her, and told her that it was actually his.

To this day, Dana said the memory is an indelible moment for her: it was when she discovered she was Palestinian.

She remembers the confusion she felt, seeing her teacher ignore the situation, and the disappointment and dismay on her dad’s face when she told him about it.

“At that moment I understood what it means to be Palestinian; it means having everything taken away from you,” she said.

Dana, whose last name The Link has agreed to omit, is now an engineering student at Concordia. She also works as vice president of fundraising and sponsorship for a youth organization called Darna Montreal—which began as an informal network connecting Palestinians across the city, but which is now a stable organization that regularly holds cultural events.

Through it, Dana seeks to repair childhood damage with community. Darna Montreal gives her and other Palestinian Montrealers an apolitical space to celebrate their culture.

“There are so many political things that come with being Palestinian, so we wanted a group that was separate from it. Even though just being Palestinian is political—the title ‘Palestinian’ itself is political,” she said. “Being around my Darna friends makes me feel at home.”

She went on to say that, in Canada, she’s always cautious of how much she shares about her Palestinian heritage with non-Palestinian strangers. When speaking about her Palestinian culture, she often feels like she has to brush it off, “like rice from a table.” Often, they react to learning that she’s Palestinian with pity, defensiveness, or even outright attacks.

“I don’t want to experience any of that. I want to feel human—thats why Darna Montreal is so important to me. Being around them is not being Palestinian. It’s just being a human, because we don’t have to justify anything to each other,” she said. “Through our regular cultural events, we’ve become a little family.”

At the centre of these events, she said, is Palestinian food.

To Dana, food is the greatest harmonizer. In the Arab region, it connects people from all different religions and classes to one another—and as someone in the diaspora, it connects her to the homeland.

One dish that holds an enriching importance to her is mujadarra, which is popular in both rich and poor communities. It’s a classic dish featuring rice, onions, and lentils.

The lentils and rice can be cooked together in the same pot and then layered over later with caramelized onions. It can be served with yogurt as a side option. Lentils, which are low in calories and rich in iron and folate, are an excellent source of protein with many health benefits.

Many Palestinian dishes are vegetarian, Dana said, but not because of any religious or cultural reasons. “Many Palestinian dishes are vegetarian, Dana said, not because of any religious or cultural reasons but because the land is so rich. “We don’t need to eat much meat to get iron or protein.
because we have what grows from the land,” she said.

She mentioned ma7shi, kusa, mukashan, and muqla-ba as other dishes that hold significance to her. Most of these are found all across the Levant—a large geographical portion of the Middle East, including countries such as Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon.

Part of the beauty of these dishes, she said, is that they are prepared and cooked differently in each region.

Nadia Irshaid Gilbert, a Palestinian chef based in New York City, similarly finds beauty in the variation of the same meals that exist across diverse Levant communities.

Gilbert specifically mentions the staple za’atar, which is a prepared condiment. It comes from the za’atar plant and tastes different wherever you go in the Levant, as its taste depends both on how it’s grown and how it’s harvested. Gilbert gets theirs from Jenin, where their family is from.

Growing up in the diaspora, their mother connected them to their identity. In Florida, they had no Palestinians around them, but their mum made sure the connection remained intact by teaching them Arabic and about their faith.

Gilbert describes being a very picky eater as a child, and they refused to eat certain American dishes. Their mother’s and relatives’ cooking fed them more than anything else. Part of this explains the reason for their journey in becoming a chef. After they left their family’s home for college, they lost access to their mother’s Palestinian cooking, so they had to learn how to cook it themselves.

Gilbert eventually created their own online cooking show called Sahtein!, where they showcase different Palestinian dishes to their audience. The aim of the show is to dismantle the idea that Palestinian dishes are difficult to cook and to empower others to learn how to do it for themselves, Gilbert said.

“T’ve been astonished by the attention the show has received,” they said. “There’s clearly a large group of people...
who are interested in these dishes.”

To Gilbert, the show has not only been collaborative, through teaching recipes to a receptive audience, but also a personal and meditative experience.

“I used to feel very disconnected. When I cook, I focus on nourishing myself and showing myself love. In this way, it really helped me connect to myself more fully,” they said. “There’s so much power in what we eat. What we eat literally becomes us. I find it sad that people find cooking a chore or just something you have to do in between all the things going on in your day. The food we eat is more important than we realize.”

The food that carries the most significance to her is mlokieh—in English, it’s called jute marrow. It’s a green that is minced and is served with rice and roasted chicken. The dish can be very garlicky. Gilbert describes the plant that mlokieh comes from—as named mlokieh—as “one of the most deeply nourishing plants on earth.”

“When I eat it, I feel safe, I feel home,” they said.

The consumption of Palestinian food involves deep presence and sharing for both Dana and Gilbert. Dana mentions that a common practice her family partakes in is eating from the same plate. One of the rules involved in this is that you have to eat from what’s in front of you—regardless of whether or not you like it.

“So if you don’t like a piece of meat you’re given, you’re not allowed to grab around to get someone else’s meat. “ She said. “By looking in front of you, it forces you to be present.”

Dana mentions that before a meal, her family says Bismillah, which is Arabic for “in the name of God” and then after eating, they say Alhamdulillah, which is a thank you to God. This comes from Islamic tradition. It is also important to eat the entirety of everything, which is based in both Palestinian and Islamic tradition, she said.

Amongst these enriching facets of the cuisine, the disturbing politics unfortunately exist in the background. The colonial violence—which is an enduring disruption—has affected the food culture. Israel’s illegal occupation of the West Bank has severely harmed Palestine’s agricultural sector, according to Al Jazeera. Due to checkpoints, farmers are deprived of access to fertile land, water sources, and markets.

There is an exploitation taking place, said Dana. In Palestine, the checkpoints act as barriers that limit the ability of Palestinians to share recipes.
There is also an external issue, where the profits from food exports barely make it into the hands of the people who actually farmed, harvested, or packaged the food, said Dana. This is disastrous not only for the individuals working with the food but negatively affects Palestine’s economy, the well-being of the people, and the culture’s legacy on a collective level.

“Food is one of the most important parts of our heritage—if it’s no longer ours, we’re losing so much,” she said.

“I live in the diaspora so I can’t speak for those living in Palestine,” Gilbert said. “But there are so many Palestinian farmers who have to deal with settler violence, with people destroying their crops, or stopping them from being able to get to their farmlands.”

Dana also thinks there is an appropriation taking place in Western countries, such as Canada, where food companies make profits off of traditional Palestinian foods—such as hummus—without crediting the country it originates from.

According to an article in The New York Times, Palestinian food also tends to be oversimplified with the larger term “Middle Eastern food” or “Mediterranean food.” Gilbert said that this is homogenizing as there are so many nuances in Palestinian food.

Even though Gilbert was initially angered by this and by other factors of the exploitation, they now choose to alchemize their rage into joy for Palestinian cuisine. Gilbert said the Israeli occupation and the oversimplification of the “Middle Eastern food” label definitely contribute to erasure. They spend most of their time, however, focusing on the act of sharing information about the food and on ways to amplify the culture through it.

People are genuinely interested in learning about the culture, Gilbert said, and as time has passed, people have grown less and less ignorant about it.

“It’s a really beautiful thing to see people open their hearts and learn more about the soul of our food,” they said.

Dana echoes this, adding that the aspect of her Palestinian identity that she’s most proud of—besides the strength of community—is resilience.

“We’re able to turn any situation, despite how negative it is, into something liveable, humane, and artistic,” she said.

This resilience is similarly seen through the food and its culture.

“We make things out of literally anything. We will cook and make good meals out of anything,” She said.

“Despite all of the barriers, the food culture continues to expand and bring more people in,” said Gilbert.

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**MA7SHI:**
A versatile dish that can take the form of anything rolled up with rice stuffed inside of it—meat can be included in it as well. One example of this is the savoury Diwali—which are rolled up grape leaves containing rice, and possibly onions, potatoes and meat, all stuffed inside. Another example is Kusa—Dana’s favorite.

**KUSA:**
This is stuffed zucchini. It can take its form in a range of different variations, and can be stuffed with a variety of ingredients—from different sorts of meats to different sorts of vegetables. A variation includes Kusa Bel Laban, where the stuffed zucchini is submerged in a bowl of creamy, white, thick yoghurt sauce. The yoghurt sauce can be mixed together with a variation of fresh herbs and spices—including parsley, mint, cilantro and dill—to accentuate its flavour.

**MUKASHAN:**
A mouth-watering dish where taboon bread is covered with Sumac—a tangy, acidic and fragrant spice made from the ground berries of the wild Sumac flower—and topped with onions and chicken. Nuts can also be added onto the meal.

**MUQLABA:**
A staple dish which literally translates into “upside-down”, from Arabic to English. This fun dish is made by placing chicken, vegetables, and cooked rice all layered on top of each other, in that order, in a pot. It is then boiled for 30 minutes, and then inverted onto a plate, so that the ingredients are all solidified together in a cake formation, with the chicken at the top and the rice...
### Masthead

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<td>Nanor Froundjian</td>
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<td>Michelle Malnasi</td>
<td>opinions editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mzwandile Poncana</td>
<td>copy editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esteban Cuevas</td>
<td>photo editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas Dundorf</td>
<td>video editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joey Bruce</td>
<td>graphics editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel Boucher</td>
<td>business manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime MacLean</td>
<td>system administrator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Contributors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curtis McRae</td>
<td>Marie-Alix Motte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reina Ephrahim</td>
<td>Eric Dicaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Wu</td>
<td>Stephanie Bodea</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lauren Terrell</td>
<td>Florent Aniorte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Lundy</td>
<td>Matilda Cerone</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Harrison Swan Yue</td>
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### Board of Directors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Savannah Stewart</td>
<td>Voting Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Perez</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivier Cadotte</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erika Morris</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Laura Beeston</td>
<td>Non-Voting Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel Boucher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marcus Bankuti</td>
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*The Link* acknowledges our location on unceded Indigenous land. The Kanien’kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of these lands and waters. Tiohtiá:ke is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations.

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