

MUSHROOM & PROSCIUTTO PINWHEELS

I discovered the joy of working with puff pastry late in life. It can be used for so many things—turning your chicken stew into a potpie, making a quick apple galette, or creating the classic Baked Brie en Croûte. If you want to be a hero, you can certainly make your own, but really, who has that much time? You can easily find puff pastry sheets in your local grocery freezer section.

I first made these simple pinwheels when I found some leftover pizza toppings in my fridge. It's a great hors d'oeuvre and you might want to think about doubling the recipe because they'll be gone nearly as soon as you set them down.

INGREDIENTS

1 sheet frozen puff pastry

Flour for rolling out pastry

2 tablespoons olive oil

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup prosciutto, diced

$\frac{1}{2}$ shallot, diced

6 mushrooms, diced

2 cloves garlic, minced

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup Parmesan cheese, finely grated.

1 egg, beaten

Salt and pepper to taste

PREPARATION

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Defrost the puff pastry sheet as per directions on the box.

In a skillet, heat olive oil. Sauté prosciutto and shallots for two minutes, add mushrooms and garlic, and continue sauté for three minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Turn off heat and mix in half of the Parmesan cheese. Set aside.

On a floured surface, roll out puff pastry, keeping rectangular shape, just enough to thin out a bit.

Spoon out mushroom mixture on top of pastry. Using an offset palette, spread mixture until the pastry is covered with a thin layer, leaving $\frac{1}{2}$ inch border without mixture on one of the shorter sides.

Wet your finger with water and run it down the border.

Moving from the other end, roll up the pastry. Pinch the border to seal closed.

Using half of the beaten egg, brush it over the pastry roll. If the pastry has warmed up too much and is very soft, place the roll in the refrigerator for 20 minutes.

Remove roll from refrigerator. Cut 16 slices, as if you were cutting a Toll House cookie roll, and place slices on a greased baking sheet or Silpat. Brush slices with the other half of the egg wash. Sprinkle remaining Parmesan cheese on top of each piece.

Bake for 15 – 20 minutes until golden brown. Let cool for five minutes before plating.

FRENCH HARVEST SOUP

I'm proud to say, this was my first televised recipe. We did a "crew favorite" episode on *Emeril Live*, and this recipe was my contribution. One fan from California gave me this rave review on the website, *"Her current employer may have to make space for her at the counter to showcase her cooking expertise! This recipe is WONDERFUL and easy! I added some beets to the mix and it gives the soup a deep pink color—and tastes just as delicious. A hearty soup to enjoy on a cold day. I'm glad we had leftovers—we couldn't get enough of this wonderful soup!"*

INGREDIENTS

1 large yellow onion, skinned and quartered

1 large sweet pepper

1 large bell pepper

1 head garlic, cut in half

3 ears corn

1 large tomato

2 yukon gold potatoes, halved

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil

3 cups chicken stock or bone broth

salt and pepper

1 tablespoon adobo sauce (chipotle)

$\frac{1}{2}$ pound gruyere cheese, thickly grated

12 bread croutons

2 cloves crushed garlic

PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Place onion, peppers, garlic, corn, tomato, and potatoes on baking sheet. Generous brush with olive oil and season with salt and pepper.

Roast for approximately 45 minutes until al dente. Skin should be broken on peppers and tomatoes. Peel off skin when cool.

Chop vegetables into large chunks. Place in pot and add enough chicken stock to almost cover vegetables. Add adobo sauce. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Bring to boil, then simmer for 20 minutes.

Pour strained veggies into crock. Add broth to fill crock leaving $\frac{1}{2}$ " to the top of lip. Place croutons on top and cover with grated cheese.

WHAT MOTHER NATURE REALLY INTENDED

"I wouldn't eat that if I were you. That's a poisonous one."

Ed, "The Fungi," grabs my arm just before I reach some white mushrooms at the base of an enormous oak tree. They look just like the ones I usually buy at Stop and Shop.

"Those are Amanita Phalloides, otherwise known as Death Caps. Nasty suckers."

Contemplating my near demise, I wince as I follow behind him, traipsing my way through this damp northern California forest.

“Did you know there are over 10,000 species of fungi that produce mushrooms? You got your poisonous ones, your edibles, and of course, my favorites, the magic ones.”



Ed is a big burly guy with a full beard that seems like it hasn't been trimmed since the summer of Woodstock. He lives in an RV, currently tucked away in the woods, complete with a full kitchen, bathroom and probably a big bag of weed stashed somewhere behind the driver's seat. He seems to be the point person for a collection of mushroom zealots that scour the forest floor in search of these little earthy treasures. I'm scouting this hunt to see if it will make a good segment for our show, *"Emeril Live."* Thanks to Ed's enthusiasm, I can tell it will.

“Aha! Here they are!” he gleefully announces.

Ed reaches down toward the bottom of a beautiful Douglas fir tree, digging up some glorious golden mushrooms.

“Smell this. It's got an almost fruity aroma,” he insists.

“It’s a chanterelle.”

He hands me a delicate, yet cold and firm mushroom that I actually recognize. I’ve mostly seen it in its dried out and travel weary form at Dean and Deluca’s for \$24.00 per pound.



“Just inhale. Chanterelles are best cooked. Raw ones might upset the old tum-tum.”

Again, here’s another warning about the toxins that seem to surround me.

“You’re sure smelling is okay?” I ask to make double sure.

“Yes, a good whiff of chanterelle never hurt anybody.”

He’s right. The mushroom does have a fruity smell—almost like an apricot. I had no idea that this meaty and fragrant fungus was what a chanterelle should really be like.



This isn't the first time my eyes have been opened to the value of having something fresh from the earth. My television infused culinary education has not only treated me to a backstage pass into some of the great kitchens in the country, but it has also given me an opportunity to meet some of the most passionate farmers, foragers, and food enthusiasts. It always amazes me how much depth of knowledge they have about a single crop or about the minerals of a certain terroir or where in a vast sea you can find that big tuna that would much prefer to keep on swimming. But more than anything, it's those memorable bites of tasting something in its purest form that makes you realize this is the way Mother Nature intended it to be.

—Excerpted from *GETTING SAUCED—How I Learned Everything I Know About Food from TV*

THE RAMBUTINI

When it comes to weird fruit, don't judge a rambutan by its cover. These fruits— that frighteningly remind me of telescopic images of the coronavirus—have been here far longer than this awful plague. If you've ever wandered around your local Chinatown markets, you'll see them right between the longans and the mangosteens.

But when you get past their ugly exterior and delicately slice around their hairy bellies, you'll be treated to a delightfully light and sweet orb that's perfect for this martini.

INGREDIENTS (makes 2)

3 rambutans, skins and pits removed

4 ounces of Empress Gin

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ginger syrup

2 teaspoons lemon juice

lemon strips or a twist for garnish

cucumber slice for garnish

ice

I like using Empress 1908 Indigo Gin for this cocktail because it has a great balance of botanicals and the indigo color turns a light violet with the addition of the lemon.

To peel rambutans, make a $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch slice around the belly of the fruit. Twist and gently squeeze the skin and the fruit should pop out. Remove the pit and rough chop the fruit.

Muddle the fruit in the bottom of the shaker. Add the gin, ginger syrup, lemon juice, and ice. Shake vigorously. Pour

into martini glasses and garnish with a slice of cucumber and lemon strips.

BAO TODAY, GONE TOMORROW

You can tell a lot about a country by what people eat for breakfast. Here in Brooklyn, it's all about the rough and tumble bagel and a schmear. In France, how can you start the day without an elegant croissant and café au lait? In Japan, how about some healthy steamed rice, miso soup and grilled fish to get your engine going?

To me, there's no place like Singapore to challenge your notion of what constitutes a satisfying breakfast. As a myriad of cultures mix and mash together, it's hard to say which one has the strongest hold on people's morning habits. For me, it was always a toss up between kaya toast and eggs or Char Siu Bao. Both are delicious and as unhealthy as can be imagined.

Kaya Toast and very soft-boiled egg



Kaya toast is simply toasted white bread slathered in coconut paste AND butter. It's usually served with a soft-boiled egg that isn't quite soft-boiled. The egg is simply placed in the bottom of a pot, boiling water is poured over it and then it's immediately removed. The whites have barely congealed and the yolk is runnier than water. And it's disgustingly delicious. You crack the egg open in a small bowl, add a squirt of soy sauce and a dash of white pepper, and let the toast suck up all that yummy goodness. And of course, you must wash it down with some Kopi tarik, a.k.a. "pulled coffee," a local coffee mixed with sugar. The brewed coffee is poured repeatedly from

one container to another using a strainer to give it a rich taste and extra thickness. It's served with sweetened condensed milk just in case the sugar didn't sweeten it enough for you.



Kopi Tarik

But my true favorite start to the day is a Char Siu Bao. On almost any corner, there's a small hawker stall with a steam box offering these delicate treats—roasted barbeque pork encased in a light, doughy pillow. It's sort of their version

of a jelly donut except it's savory and not fried. Actually, it's nothing like a jelly donut.

On the corner of Jalan Besar and Maude Street on the outskirts of Little India in Singapore—should you ever find yourself there—is an unassuming storefront that prides itself on its traditional homemade baos. Piles of huge wooden steam racks stack one upon another, cranking out hundreds of baos a day. I'd share the name of the place, but everything is written in Chinese and my Cantonese is wanting.



Of course, there is no lack of opinions about pork buns. And back here in the states, I've been on a mission to find something that rivals those I guiltily consumed in Singapore. Most dim sum joints here in New York offer their version of

char siu bao, often simply listed as steamed pork buns on their menus. The Nam Wah Tea Parlor on Doyers street has a very respectable one, but I do find the balance between bun and pork to be a bit off, the bun overwhelming the filling. The Mei Lai Wah Bakery on Bayard Street has a baked char siu bao. The baking adds a light, soft brown crust to the bun and there's a balanced pork to bun ratio.



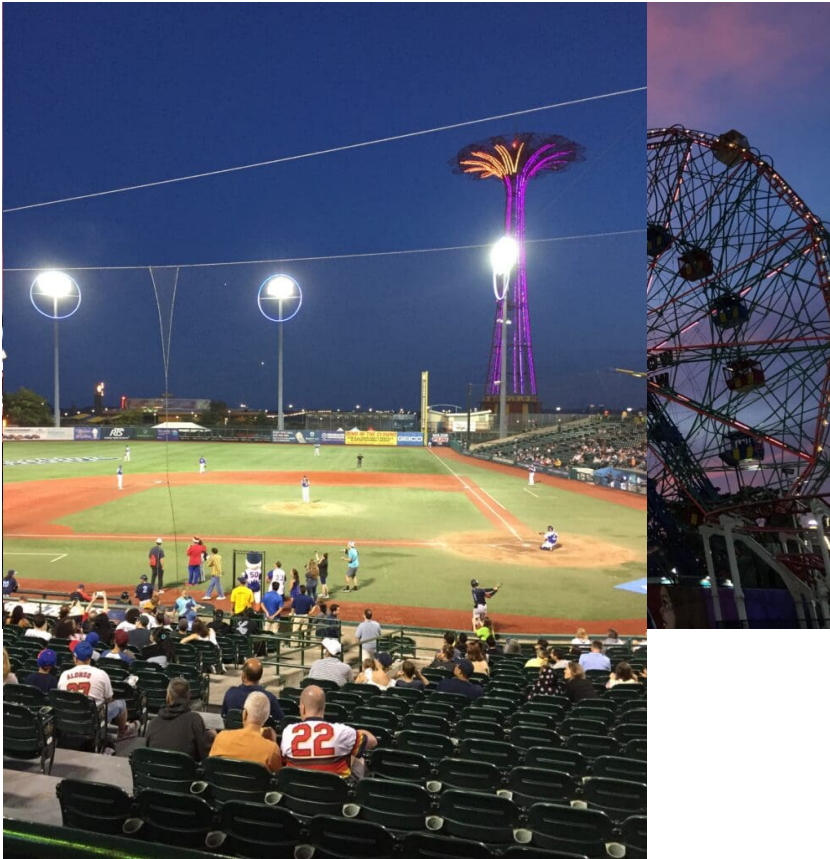
Mei Lai Wah Bakery

But hands down, Tim Ho Wan in the east village has THE best-baked buns. There's a nice, sweet, buttery crunch as you bite into it, and their char siu is spot on. It's not surprising considering they call themselves the "dim sum specialists," having originating from Hong Kong. And it's not hype. They've got locations all over the world, including Singapore where I first sampled my first baked bao. Thankfully, nothing is lost in translation.



So now I can rest easy knowing that on any given morning there are baos in abundance a mere subway ride away. I've even seen them in Trader Joe's freezer case, though I fear that is just way too convenient and dangerous. Of course, I can always lighten up the most important meal of the day and do as the Mexicans do. Chilaquillas anyone?

ONE LAST GASP OF SUMMER



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And the place for all of that is my beloved Coney Island. Over

the years it has managed to revive itself without losing its tacky, old school charm. Even though they've installed insane new rides that seem to threaten to hurl you into the ocean with one push of the wrong button, you can still go to Nathan's and get fries that have probably been soaked in the same oil they've been using since 1945. Don't get me wrong, aged oil has its charms.

After the grease has fully coated my intestines, my hubby and I walk down Surf Avenue to catch a Brooklyn Cyclones game. They are our home minor league baseball team affiliated with the New York Mets. For twenty-five bucks we can sit behind the plate, watch a very quick game because no one ever seems to get on base, and look out at the landmark parachute jump that my parents used to ride. But the best parts of the game are the quick entertaining breaks between innings. Last Friday night they featured a dance by The Pacemakers, a senior citizen version of the Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders with walkers, a race between a bottle of catsup, relish and mustard mascots sponsored by Nathan's, (catsup won), a toilet plunger toss, and a guy who proposed to his girlfriend only to be mortified when she said no and started screaming expletives at him. This is the local flavor of Brooklyn that I love. Not to mention the greasy knish I ate on the way out of the ballpark, walking as quickly as I could to beat the rush to the boardwalk for the final fireworks display of the season.

And it did not disappoint. Although I can still smell the smoke in my hair from the falling ash, there's nothing better than being right under the fireworks as they blaze against the sky. As their cascading sparks reach back down to kiss the beach, I snuggle with my husband to stay warm from the cool ocean breezes. I can feel autumn trying to sneak its way in, but here in Brooklyn, all we have to say about that is "fuhgeddaboutit."

ROASTED TOMATO SOUP

It's harvest time, so that means the neighbors have way too many tomatoes to know what to do with them. So, being the lucky recipient of their abundance, I'm putting this year's bounty to good use with this creamy roasted tomato soup. There's nothing better than making tomato soup from fresh garden ingredients.

Wait, oh yes, there is one thing better—creamy homemade garden tomato soup with a grilled cheese sandwich. Gotta go – I've got some sandwiches to make.

INGREDIENTS

1 dozen ripe plum tomatoes (or whatever tomatoes you have from the garden)

1 onion, thickly sliced

1 head of garlic

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon red pepper flakes

1 Tablespoon olive oil

2 cups of chicken stock

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup heavy cream

salt and pepper to taste

FOR GARNISH

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated Parmesan

fresh basil leaves

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PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place aluminum foil on the bottom of a baking sheet.

Slice a $\frac{1}{2}$ " thick cross in one end of each tomato. This will make it easier to peel the tomatoes once they are roasted. Wrap a small piece of aluminum foil around the base of the garlic head to hold it together.

Place the tomatoes, onion slices and foiled garlic head on the baking sheet. Drizzle all with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Using your hands, gently massage the oil and spices to cover all sides of the vegetables. Place in oven and roast for 30 minutes.

After thirty minutes, turn the vegetables over and roast for an additional 30 minutes. Allow to cool.

Peel the skin off of the tomatoes and discard skins. Pressing the base of the garlic head, squeeze the roasted garlic out, discarding the skin. Place the tomatoes, onions and roasted garlic in a dutch oven. Add the chicken stock and red pepper flakes. Re-season with salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, then lower to a simmer for forty-five minutes, stirring occasionally. Allow to cool down.

Using an immersion blender, puree the soup. When you're ready to serve, reheat and add the cream.

Pour into bowls and garnish with parmesan and basil leaves.

THE ELUSIVE PEACH

As I kid, I couldn't wait for summer peaches—those fuzzy, succulent, sweet treats that promised pies and jams and some weird concoction my mom made with sour cream. You knew you had a good one when you bit into it and the juice dripped down your arm, making you sticky for the rest of the day.

But something happened to peaches. I know it must be some diabolical conspiracy fraught with chemicals, black market deliveries from eco-busting distances, or crate overcrowding, because I just can't find a good peach anymore. They either are bruised, too hard, too sour, or the worst crime—mealy.

I go out of my way to farmers markets, overpaying for my inevitable disappointment. I once had my cousins ship them from Georgia, and okay, they were very good, but like an idiot, I ruined most of them by attempting jam and adding in too much clove.

But I won't give up. I'm on a mission now. And, please, if you have a good source, send them my way.

WHAT DO I KNOW ABOUT FOOD?

It's 5:30am and I'm hunched over a burning hot *imu* pit, an underground steamer being prepped to hold a 250-pound pig. Two Hawaiian workers, the size of sumo wrestlers, are stoking hot lava rocks in preparation for a big *luau*, just as their ancestors have done for generations. The sun is just rising over the Pacific, soft flicks of morning light dance over the water. I can taste the salt coming in with the ocean breeze. I breathe deeply, suspecting that this will be my only moment of

peace in paradise. Breaking my reverie, one of the burly men taps my shoulder and says, "It's time."

My blood pressure starts to rise and my jaw clenches as I scan the area anxiously wondering, "Where the hell is everyone?" Just at that moment, the production truck sputters into the parking lot with my crew in tow. They know they are late and they know I won't be happy. They burst out of the van filled with excuses, coffee cups in hand.

"Listen. 5:30 means 5:30—not 6:00! You've already missed the lava rocks going in and now they need to lay down the *ti* leaves. The whole point of coming to Hawaii was to capture this *luau*. You think this is supposed to be a vacation?" I shriek.

As my shamed Keystone Cop-crew scrambles with their cases and cables trying to set up to videotape this process, I realize that for all the fun I'm having, I might as well be in Newark.

It sure sounds glamorous from the outside looking in: an all-expenses-paid trip to Hawaii with America's most popular chef, eating and cooking our way across the islands. But here's the catch—and there's always a catch—I have to shoot three broadcast hours of mouth-watering, hunger-provoking food porn on three different islands at fifteen locations in six days. And just to make matters worse, both my crew and my star resent that we're here in Hawaii and I am actually making them work.

There have been days like this. There have been many. And there have been some good ones too. After all, it's the good days that sustain me. I've been a television producer my entire career. I've seen actors I've admired behave as if they were reliving their terrible twos. I've nearly had a live show shut down by a bribe-seeking union foreman. I've run up Sixth Avenue in the middle of gridlocked traffic from 14th Street to 34th Street, the final show master in my hand, with only four

minutes left before it's supposed to hit the air. The stress and chaos are the only things consistent about the work I do. The rush comes from being assigned an impossible task and making it possible.

That was all before the Food Network called. They want me to be the executive producer for a hot new chef out of New Orleans. His name is Emeril Lagasse. I think to myself, "What the hell—cooking has got to be better than this. I'll give it a shot for six months."

Those six months turned into thirteen years and over 1500 hours of food television. Eyewitness to the scrappy early days of the fledgling TV Food Network, I was one of the many that worked on the transformation of cooking shows from sleepy on-air instructional manuals to glitzy must-watch TV. And during that time, I came to understand why the food we eat is so much more than just something to fuel our bodies. It's about love and comfort and pleasure.

Whether it's scrounging the farmer's market for the sweetest heirloom tomatoes with just the right amount of acidity or learning how to cook *à la minute*, almost everything I know about food, I learned from TV. I've had the pleasure—and sometimes trauma—of witnessing some of the country's top chefs in action from a front row seat. It has made for some vivid storytelling at parties (and perversely made me a popular guest). Some of these culinary stars may not remember me, but I remember them. I remember their precise insight into the perfect ingredients, their ability to share their passion to the point of contagion, and most importantly, their generosity of spirit—give or take an egomaniacal tantrum or two. All of them in their own way have taught me not only how to cook, but how to cook with love and enthusiasm.

But as much as they may have influenced my personal culinary techniques, I have to give credit to the family and friends early in my life who truly inspired my zeal for food. From

learning how to make my Nana's apple pie to realizing there's no point in ever making my mother's Lipton Onion Soup semi-homemade glazed brisket, most of my strongest memories have food as my co-star. It has shaped me, in more ways than one.

My home today has two kitchens. No, not one for milk and one for meat like some of my ancestors, but one for sweets and one for savory foods. I have a thermostat controlled wine cooler, and a culinary library of over 500 books. My next-door neighbor and I have been trying to perfect all five mother sauces by cross-referencing my copy of Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* with his copy of The Culinary Institute of America's *The Professional Chef*. We're up to velouté. The tomato and *espagnole* were big hits, but we still have to conquer *hollandaise* and *béchamel*. My husband and I have gotten so much praise for our own cooking that we are no longer invited to our friends' dinner parties for their fear of disappointing us. (*My specialty is grilled white pizza with a melange of mushrooms, shallots, garlic and pancetta beneath a bed of taleggio cheese finished with a drizzle of truffle oil.*) When I go into a restaurant "announced" the red carpet is rolled out and I roll out with a sated smile, extended stomach, and Tums standing by in my purse. It's been a long journey from a childhood sponsored by Kraft and Mrs. Paul's to three-star Michelin dinners. I can honestly say I've lived a good life very much thanks to food. If only I could dig an *imu* pit in Brooklyn, I could die a happy woman.

My culinary awakening is forever entangled with the evolution of food television becoming our national comfort pastime. I like to think we grew up together, learning from our mistakes and trying to push the boundaries of how we think about food and cooking. At times my story might seem a little half-baked, sometimes a bit overdone, but at its heart, it's one deep dish of a delicious journey.

—Excerpted from *GETTING SAUCED—How I Learned Everything I Know About Food from TV*

NEVER CAN SAY GOODBYE

I was only 5 years old at the time, but the memory of my first trip into “the city” is so vivid I can still taste the cinnamon raisin sticky buns from Horn and Hardart. I can hear the city tuning up as the sounds of blaring sirens, screaming cab drivers and jackhammers blend together, rising to a crescendo. I can feel the sidewalks burst with energy as people hustle from place to place, brushing up against each other, and scattering in all directions.

Just moments before, as I stand on the seat of a Long Island Railroad car, watching the split-level houses whiz by the window, my mother and grandmother remind me, “When we get to the city, you can’t run off. You need to stay close and pay attention at all times, you hear me?” We are on a mission. It is time to buy me a big girl bedroom set and someone named Macy or Gimbel will have just the right one.

Exiting Penn Station, they each grab one of my hands, daring anyone to try to break our chain. They are both native New Yorkers and they know the rules: don’t look anyone in the eye, walk as if you know where you’re going, and always hold your purse with a death grip. There is danger at every turn.

This was the mid-sixties and New York was going through a tough time. While my mom waxed poetic about the city of her youth when the subway cost a nickel and she swooned to Frank Sinatra performing at the Paramount, something had changed. With drugs, crime, and poverty on the rise, the city had become dirty, unsafe, and congested. It was no place to raise a family. I’m a third generation New Yorker and the goal of the first two generations was to do everything they could to get out. The exodus plan of the New York Jew was to head east

to Long Island. For my generation, we would spend our youth trying to get back in.





Broadway sign and red stop light in New York City at night

By the mid-seventies, I was old enough to venture into Manhattan with my theater geek high school friends. We were an eclectic mix of kids who shared one thing in common; we didn't seem to fit in anywhere. We were nerds, un-athletic, unpopular, and starved for attention. The city seemed to not only welcome misfits; it celebrated them. This was a few years before the AIDS epidemic would ravage the theater community, and New York was on fire with creativity and energy. The music scene was changing as folk music and jazz made way for punk and disco. In theater, the classics by Rodgers and Hammerstein were eclipsed by rock musicals like *Hair*, *Godspell* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

With our bell-bottom jeans brushing along the dirty sidewalks of Times Square, we became one with an endless sea of strangers. We stopped at HoJos for a quick bite and spent all of our babysitting money for tickets to see the original cast in *A Chorus Line*. We spent hours in Colony Records looking

through old cast recordings of obscure Broadway shows. We imagined our grown up lives here and knew that while the lights of Broadway beckoned, there was also a seedy side, complete with peep shows and hustlers. It gave us a rush of something forbidden and dangerous. We loved all of it and wanted to be part of it.

After college, I was determined to make my way in New York. Through some contacts, I landed my first job working as an office manager for a television producer. I was really his secretary, but I gave myself the title “office manager” to sound more important. I moved into a funky apartment I couldn’t afford on Bleecker Street, hung up a big wooden “K” on my wall, and never looked back. This was the beginning of my four-decade love affair with New York.



Like any true love affair, it has had its share of joy,

heartache, exhilaration, pain, passion and betrayal. As a kid, I remember walking up Sixth Avenue and looking at the trio of skyscrapers across from Radio City, hoping that someday I'd have an office in one of them. And one day I did. It didn't matter that the building next to me blocked my view and I could see into the office of a man who liked to eat his lunch at his desk without his pants on. I was living the New York dream and accepted all the good, the bad, and the ugly that came with it.

I quickly learned about street smarts and how to size up situations in an instant. To this day, as I am smashed against a smelly sea of humanity, I scan about the subway car assessing who will exit at what stop. I plant myself in front of "commuter girl," and as she leaves the train at 34th Street, I settle into her seat for the rest of my ride home, only to be one-upped by the pregnant woman who knows how to play the same game.

People who don't live in New York always wonder how we can put up with it: the crowds, the noise, the hustle, and the high cost of everything. They don't understand what it's like to play hooky from work and sunbathe in Central Park. They haven't shared a first kiss while standing beneath the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center, just as the first snowflakes of winter fall from the sky. They can't walk out the door, and within two blocks, pick up everything they need to make a gourmet meal, including sea urchin and truffle oil. They haven't experienced the community and camaraderie that happens during a black out, or a snow day, or the worst day we'll ever remember. New York gets under your skin in such a deep way that it's hard to imagine leaving.

But, I do try to imagine it, only to be sidetracked by the usual questions. Where would I go? Who would understand my humor? Where would I fit in? I've traveled and worked all over

the world and have yet to find any other place that I can call home. My ancestors migrated to the wilds of West Palm Beach, but I hate humidity and the smell of mildew. I worked in LA, but spent more time in traffic than at work. The Midwest is too cold, the Southwest too hot. Europe has its spots, but I speak no other languages. I've tried country living, but I'm convinced there are hatchet murderers lurking in the woods. I briefly lived and worked in Singapore where you'd think the dim sum would be better, but I still prefer the Nam Wah Tea Parlor down on Doyers Street in Chinatown.

I'm starting to get older now, not quite ready for retirement, but not far from it. When we moved into our neighborhood in Brooklyn, my husband and I were the cute couple at the end of the block. Now we're the sage elders who help the newlyweds find the best plumbers and electricians. Like the oak trees that have grown higher and block our view, we are rooted here. We often walk these familiar streets as I drive my husband crazy with thoughts about where we could live, or how we might want to shake things up. We pass some neighbors and shoot the breeze, making plans for a roof deck barbecue. We admire the brownstone repair at #110, speculating if they were happy with their contractor. We pass our front garden, wondering when the irises will come up.

Too busy pondering life's big questions to have shopped for dinner, we cross the street to our favorite sushi bar. I'm still going on about where we might go when we can no longer walk up our four flights of stairs. My ever-patient husband gently interrupts me, and simply says, "What's wrong with here?"

As we enter the sushi restaurant, we hear the familiar Japanese welcome, "Irasshaimase!" We don't have to order; the sushi chef knows what we like. We settle in, chatting with some of the regulars at the bar. Our waitress brings over our personal chopsticks that are kept in an old dented tin above the counter. We order our favorite sake, and as I pause to

make a toast, snapshots of our life here in New York flood my mind; bumping into old friends on the boardwalk at Coney Island, asking my next door neighbor to remove the dead squirrel from the roof drain because I can't deal with rodents, dancing to Donna Summer's "Love to Love You Baby" at the Heartbreak on Varick Street, fighting with the city about who is going to pay for the sidewalk they just tore up, holding down Big Bird in the Thanksgiving Day Parade, helping remove fallen branches from a neighbor's walkway after a freak tornado, walking through the park at twilight, begging the sanitation guy to not plow in the corner I just shoveled, exchanging vows at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, having our hearts broken as a procession of ash covered fellow New Yorkers walk past our house, grabbing a gyro from a street cart vendor because I have no time to go to lunch, grazing through Sunday's Smorgasburg, exploring Christo's saffron colored "The Gates" in Central Park, searching for zeppoles at the Heaven on Seventh street fair, waiting for the cable guy, protesting side-by-side with nearly every woman in New York, bringing a hysterical neighbor and her kid to the emergency room after she accidentally dropped her daughter on her head, (she was fine), ordering my bagel and schmear at the corner deli, listening to the quiet of the city after a three foot snow dump, applauding New York health care workers every night at seven, watching the New Year's fireworks from our roof, standing at JFK's customs as the agent says, "Welcome Home."

As I savor these memories, I raise my sake cup to my husband's and say, "You know, there's nothing wrong with here."