

TEN THINGS THAT DRIVE ME NUTS



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- 1) When my mother calls saying she doesn't mean to complain and then is still at it twenty minutes later.
- 2) When I've just put on my Sunday best only to get pooped on by a passing pigeon.
- 3) When I order a pizza and they put HIS olives on MY half.
- 4) When my ankle twists and I fall in the most ungraceful way possible.
- 5) When the only mail I get are bills.
- 6) When I try to be responsible and put my AC on ECO mode only to sweat during the off-cycles.

7) Canned peas.

8) When squirrels have their way with our vegetable garden.

9) When my husband comes home with all the ingredients we need for a dish except for the one he forgot.

10) When my doctors preface everything with, "Well, you know at your age..."

DON'T YOU JUST HATE IT WHEN...

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As much as I love it here in Brooklyn, it does have its challenges. It seems that ripping up the streets to replace one-hundred year old water mains is a relatively good idea, but not when it means they close your street and force the entire block to use your corner as a garbage dump. In an attempt at humor or art, one anonymous neighbor, or perhaps a mischievous passerby, took it upon himself to hang empty recycling bags on the iron window guards of our house. A few had expired boxes of food stuffs, while most seemed to be there just for show. It took some effort to mount the installation, as the bag handles were tightly knotted to the iron grates. I'm not sure what message was being sent, but W.T.F.?

(NOTE: As of this writing, and after a rather terse note was sent out to our block association, no one, surprisingly, has stepped forward to take credit for this work. Any leads would be appreciated.)

PORTUGAL SNAPSHOTS



Almost everywhere you go in Portugal, there's an image waiting to be captured. Whether you've brought your iPhone, your fancy SLR camera, or the moment itself seers deep inside your memory bank, Portugal is a land of breathtaking and memorable sites. Even on a dreary day as the sun naps behind the clouds, mother nature is still ready for her close-up. Reclaiming a bench once meant for lovers, she lounges in her best moss and lichen gown warning you not to disturb her sanctuary.□



Porto, Portugal's second largest city, sits majestically along the *Douro* river estuary in the north. Storybook buildings rise with the surrounding mountains, wasting no space as they jut up against each other like passengers in a crowded elevator. It's the perfect backdrop for moviemakers looking to shoot any time period since the advent of electricity. One gets the sense that nothing much has changed over the years. The surrounding twisting valleys with grape terraces etched into the earth still produce the world's finest ports. Locals go about their business, dodging the tourists that have gone to one tasting too many. It's got everything one could want—great food, great wine and the promise of great romance.□



Not far from Lisbon, the *Palácio de Pena*—or Pena Palace—emerges through the thick fog, its vibrant colors refusing to be obscured by the tenacious mist. Built in the Romanticist architectural style, this—quite frankly over-the-top castle is said to have inspired King Ludwig II's German castle, *Neuschwanstein*, which then inspired Walt Disney to create his castle in Disneyland. While you wait for the fog to clear, spend some time in the nearby village of Sintra at one of their many cafés. Make sure to try some *Pasteis de Nata*—those heavenly egg custard tartlets that should make everyone's top five list of things to taste in Portugal. Sintra even pushes the envelope with their *Queijadas*, a riff on the traditional egg custards made with the addition of cheese.□



If you were paying attention in fifth grade history class, you'd know that the Portuguese made some of the greatest discoveries in the new world. Vasco da Gama and Ferdinand Magellan might ring a bell. They are just a couple of the explorers represented on this monument.

Located on the coast near other important sights like Jerónimos Monastery and the Belém Tower in Lisbon, this monument faces the sea, the ship being led by Prince Henry the Navigator. As its rose-tinted stone pierces the azure sky, one gets the sense that this ship could sail with just one big push.



Have you ever passed by a window and wondered, “What’s the story here?” Perhaps this is the home of a woman who must trade her body in order to make enough money to care for her sick young son. Or maybe it’s a man with an underwear fetish who likes washing his neighbors dirty clothes. It’s possible that an old woman, widowed too early in life, takes in laundry to help supplement her income. Or it could simply be that a young family lives here and their dryer is broken.□

Images tell us stories. Choosing the right thousand words is the tricky part.

THE TOP TEN THINGS I LEARNED IN ASIA

- 10) A smile translates in any language. Silly translates too.
- 9) Eating local food from street vendors is like playing Russian roulette. It can be thrilling AND deadly.
- 8) You really don’t need a lot of stuff. The lighter the load, the easier the journey.
- 7) There are more western toilets around than you’d expect, but ALWAYS carry a package of tissues with you. You never know.
- 6) Technology has made the world a lot smaller and more homogenized. Truly exotic is harder and harder to find, particularly when you see traditional Balinese dancers texting backstage.
- 5) When your mother said to never cross the street in on-coming traffic, she clearly meant to add, “except in Hanoi.”

4) It appears if you are a cab driver in Hanoi, you can actually watch TV, talk on two phones at once, and still manage to steer with your elbows.

3) Yes, one can visit too many temples in Siem Reap.

2) Pictures are great, but better to remember the moment by being part of it.

1) Life is full of surprises if you're willing to be surprised

SINGAPORE First Impressions







And with the stroke of midnight, it is now my birthday. I'm celebrating alone in my very cozy business class seat, trying to keep down the three gin and tonics I foolishly chased with a *Grand Marnier* on ice, thinking it would put me to sleep. Instead, I have a pounding headache and my mouth feels as if one of those suction gizmos the dentist uses to remove all your spit is wedged under my tongue. Trying to take my mind off my ailments, I glance out the window. Below are the dimmed lights of India, a jeweled pristine sky twinkles above. It's quiet, peaceful and magnificent. I wonder what's going on down there? Are those pockets of light from a small village or could they be bouncing off the *Taj Mahal*? Or am I looking at the lights of an Ikea and its adjacent parking lots?□

It's hour nineteen of my journey from New York to Singapore and I'm equally excited and anxious. I've been hired to be the showrunner for a reality competition TV show called, *Fit for Fashion*. It's a cross between *Top Model* and *Biggest Loser*, just with smaller people. I'm replacing someone who flamed out, and walking into a show that is already behind schedule

and troubled. From my recent Skype calls to the production team, there is no question this team is stressed and going down fast. My job is to rally the troops, put the train back on the tracks and get the engine stoked to create a new show that will reach 150 million people in the Asian-English speaking market. What could go wrong?□

I've barely had time to pack my panties and blow the dust off my passport. I'm leaving my comfortable bed, the one I share with my surprisingly understanding husband, to go off on an eight-month adventure I actually know very little about. But I need this. Sometimes, opportunities come up that are so out of your comfort zone you have no choice but to go for it. I just spent a good chunk of my life producing food television and it's time to do something more challenging and less fattening. □

The sun is starting to rise from the east like a big fireball inching its way through streaks of magenta clouds. I can see the coastline of the city as an endless stream of tankers head for the harbor. The plane will soon touch down. A new day is dawning in Singapore. It's a new day for me too.

Once I arrive at my flat and settle in, hunger makes itself known, as my stomach growls with anticipation. I take the MRT (Metro) downtown to the Maxwell Road Hawker Centre, one of the more popular open air spots for cheap eats with over 100 different stalls from which to choose. Here, every province of China is represented, along with a mix of Singaporean, Malaysian, Indian and Thai dishes, each one making my mouth water. Names like *Popiah*, *Yong Tau Foo*, and *Bak Kut Tet* are just a few of the dishes I've never heard of, but am willing to try.

As I walk down the lanes, there's a Doppler-like effect of aromas. A whiff of wok-fried seafood rises and then ebbs as the pungent smell of curry takes its place, only to fade as I approach the next stall. The long line for *Hainanese* chicken

rice, Singapore's most popular dish, snakes out onto the sidewalk. Quart sized bowls of noodles with stir-fried pork and vegetables are ladled with piping hot home made broths. As far as the eye can see, people are slurping away enjoying their lunch.

I opt for *Char Kway Teow*, a Singaporean favorite recommended in one of my guidebooks. It actually originates from Malaysia and is made from flat rice noodles coated in pork fat, then stir-fried over high heat with dark soy sauce, chili, whole prawns, beans sprouts, Chinese sausage and blood cockles. I'm not quite sure why they are called blood cockles and perhaps that's best. I don't know if it's because I'm so hungry or if it's because the dish is so good, but I have to force myself not to gobble it down. It is rich and pungent, sweet and salty, and the cockles fall from their shells with ease. The portion is enough for two people, but no matter, I polish it off hoping my cast iron stomach won't fail me. ☐

Just as I take my last bite, a clap of thunder rumbles through the market. It is so loud it rattles some of the stacked plates. Within seconds, the skies open and the rain pours down, quickly creating little rivers around the market perimeter. As the tourists gather to the edges of the market wondering whether to make a run for it, I notice the locals remain seated, unconcerned. Another crack of lightning and the thunder follows, this time even louder.

The winds pick up and some of the garbage from the overflowing bins gets swept onto the streets. The rain continues to pound on the tin roof like a jackhammer breaking open a sidewalk. And still the locals remain unfazed. I overhear an elderly gentleman talking to his frightened grandson.

"It is monsoon season. Each afternoon, almost like clockwork, the skies can no longer take the heat, and they cry out in despair."☐

Ten minutes go by and the storm passes just as quickly as it entered. The sun breaks through and steam rises from the hot streets as the water begins to evaporate. With hopes of keeping my shoes dry, I tiptoe around the edges of the muddy puddles in search of my next adventure.

THE SWAP OUT

I'm standing in the middle of the Food Network kitchen as steam rises from pasta pots. The whir of a blender making pesto releases the scent of basil on a warm summer's day. The clanking of dishes and pots being washed sound almost syncopated adding to the rhythm that seems to flow in one big choreographed culinary dance.



It was my first day on the job as executive producer of *Emeril Live*. Quite frankly, all my experience had been in television, not food, so I had to get up to speed quickly to understand how the food got produced. It's the kitchen staff's job to prep the food for this show and every show, and there's a system that is streamlined, efficient, and practical.

Let's say you're making a turkey. Well, in the real world, it takes about four hours, right? Well, in TV land, you can't wait around with your crew while a bird roasts, so you've got to do things in stages. And that means, you need three to four turkeys to get the job done so you can shoot it quickly. They are called 'swap outs.' The first one is raw, so that the chef can show you how to prep and season it. The second one might be cooked halfway so you can show how to baste or turn the bird, if you want. The third is a completed bird the chef pulls from the oven, ready to slice to show the moisture content of the bird or even the technique of how to carve the bird. And the fourth and final bird is placed on a dressed platter, pristine and ready for its close-up or what we like to call its "beauty shot."

The entire process is documented in a recipe breakdown before it even gets near the set. The chefs provide a standard recipe and send it to the culinary producers who break it down on paper, step-by-step for television, so that the kitchen team knows what to shop for, how far to cook things, and in how many stages. There are shoppers that buy all of the ingredients, allowing for enough time if things need to be prepped a day or two before. On shoot days, the team preps a cart with all of the pre-chopped ingredients broken out per commercial break. If you notice, there are often a series of ramekins or small bowls filled with vegetables or spices placed in a line on the counter. They are placed in the order in which the chef will need them. Before the director calls "action," the kitchen team reviews the recipe with the chef and then the cameras are ready to roll.

I have to admit, I was a little overwhelmed by the whole kitchen process and it took a while to get up to speed. Working at Food Network made me feel as if I just enrolled in a crash course at the Culinary Institute. After a few weeks, I started to get a handle on how to manage the beast. The kitchen staff was more than eager to help me because it made their job that much easier if I knew what I was doing.

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

HOW DO YOU DO THAT?

My husband is the baker in the family and whether we're making dinner or going to someone else's house, everyone always wants to know what he's making. He is the Yoda of chocolate and has quite a few rich and delectable treats in his repertoire. One of his biggest hits is his chocolate ganache torte. Everyone always *oohs* and *aahs* over his web-like design, thinking he's taken some type of decorating class. But in truth, this design is one of the easiest to do.□

Having a few simple design tricks up your sleeve will always help elevate a dish and you can use this simple one on any dessert topped with ganache. Just make sure to pour it out evenly on top of your cake, allowing it to pour down the sides. Melt some white chocolate. Using a ziplock bag as a pastry bag, fill the bag with the white chocolate, clipping a corner to allow a thin stream to pipe out. Starting from the middle of your torte, pipe thin circles, getting larger and larger as you get towards the edge, separating each by 3/4 inch. Using a toothpick, start from the center and drag out towards the edge 4 lines, each at 90 degrees, basically

dividing the cake in quarters. Using the same technique, go in the same direction in the middle of each quarter so that you now have 8 sections. Now, we're going to finish by moving the toothpick in the opposite direction, from the outside to the center. Starting in the middle of each of the 8 sections, drag the toothpick towards the center. That's the whole trick. Really.

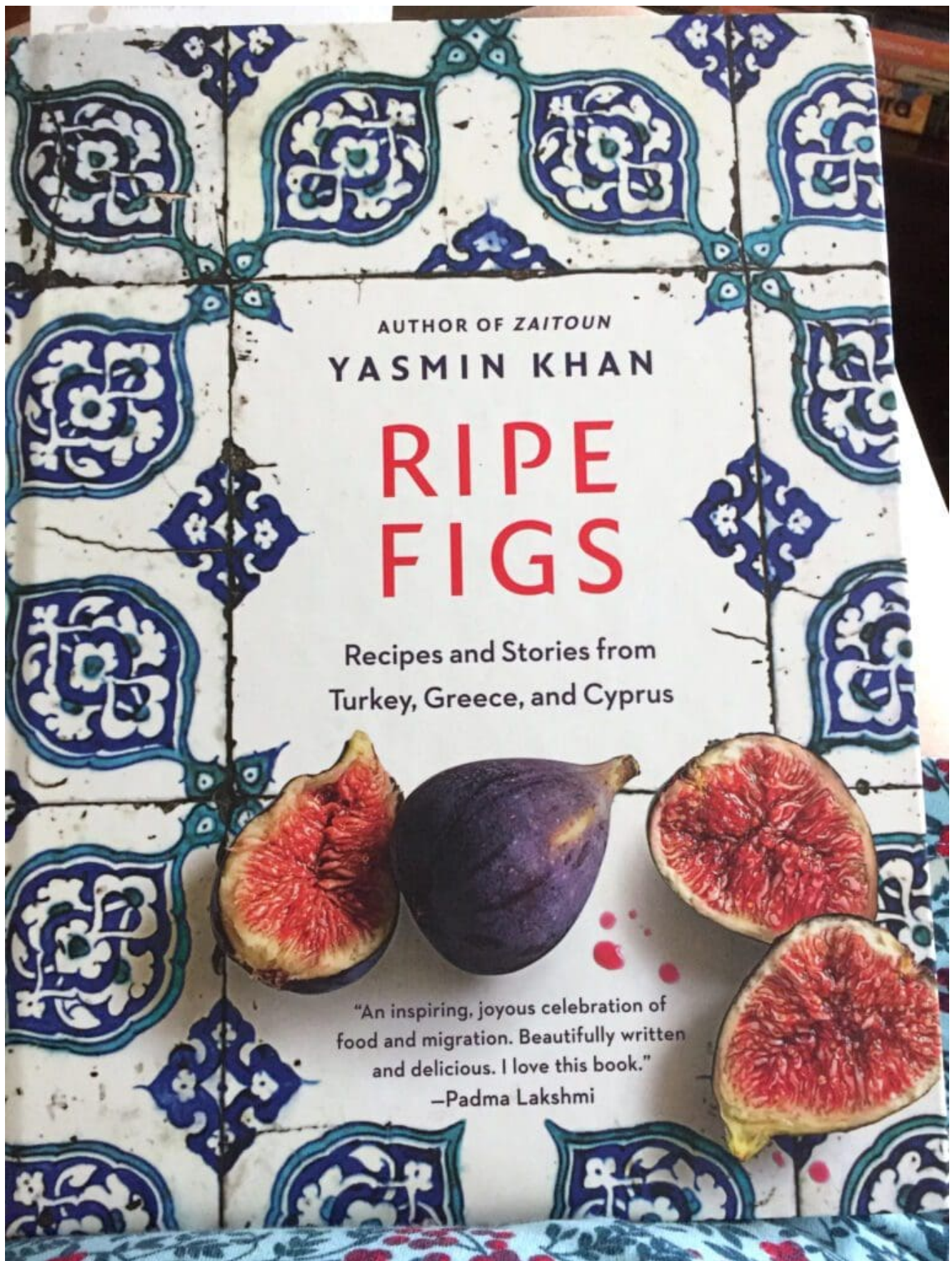
I LOVE IT WHEN IT WORKS

Usually when I make a recipe for the first time, I never quite get it right. It rarely looks like the pictures in the book, yet that doesn't stop me from trying. But every now and then I come across a cookbook that makes me look good. I've been on a Mediterranean kick lately, and my cousin introduced me to Yasmin Khan's *Ripe Figs**. I've dog-eared almost every page. Of course, rather than starting with something simple like *Tzatziki*, (a cucumber, mint and yogurt appetizer), I go for the big Turkish wedding dish, *Perde Pilavi*, a spiced chicken and rice dish hidden inside a "veil" of pastry. It looks like one of those huge *Great British Bake Off* pies, but without that heavy water crust. This crust is actually so thin, I'm not sure how it will hold all the mixture in without an implosion.

It's a bit of an *ungepatchka*, as my grandmother would say—something overly busy and fussy—but in this context, I just mean there are a lot of steps. None are difficult, but this is no 30-minute meal. The only step that gives me a bit of trouble is the crust itself. It seems to have come together nicely, but for the life of me, I just can't roll it out thin enough. I'm afraid if I try to roll it out any thinner, the dough may rip. I know I have enough to cover the bottom of the

pan and come up the sides, but if my math is right, it won't completely cover the whole bottom, leaving some of the mixture exposed. But since this dish flips over to serve, you'll never see that flaw—I hope. Rather than taking the chance of ripping the dough, I decide to leave the bottom as is and hope for the best.

This is one of those dishes that you have no idea if it works until you are ready to plate it. That's an awful lot of work and finger crossing. But I am a risk taker in the kitchen and the moment of truth is coming as soon as my timer goes off.



I make sure I've left enough time for the dish to cool before attempting the flip. I clear the counter, leaving myself enough room for this epic feat. I gingerly place the serving

plate on top of the baking pan, steady my feet, place my right hand on top, my left hand on bottom, and pray. In one deft move, I flip the dish over and place it down on the counter. I hear an unambiguous thump, giving me hope that at least the bulk has come loose. I hold my breath, slowly lifting the pie pan. The moment of truth has arrived. I can't believe it.

□“Yes!” I shout, raising my arms in the air as if I'm crossing the line after a marathon. First time out and it looks just like the picture! I slice into it and miraculously everything has held together. And even more importantly, it's absolutely delicious.

*You can find this recipe in YASMIN KHAN's book *Ripe Figs*.

MEET HERMIONE'S FIRST BORN

That beautiful bubbling source of nourishment is my beloved sourdough starter, affectionately known as Hermione. Her name comes from her father Herman who sadly died years ago when I neglected feeding him for over a month. I plan to take no chances with Hermione. She is well fed, well rested and ready to get to work. I've spent hours watching and re-watching Apollonia Poilâne's bread making Masterclass, and I think I'm ready to make her sourdough wheat loaf.

I would like to say that I created Hermione totally from scratch, but I have to admit, I did use King Arthur's sourdough starter to get things going. I meticulously followed the instructions and fed Hermione twice a day for five days. I even bought her a nice home—a 1.5 liter Weck Jar from Amazon. It has a nice wide opening so that it's easy to stick a

spatula inside and mix the flour and water around without half of it ending up on my shirt.

□It is day six, so Hermione should be more than ready for Apollonia's recipe. Everything seems to be going along fine. As I mix the ingredients together, I notice the dough seems a bit tough, but what do I know? Eventually I put it aside to rise after ten minutes of arm aching kneading.



On the video, after the first rise, Apollonia lovingly lifts the dough out of the bowl as it gently stretches out towards the table so that she can fold it upon itself. When I lift

mine, it doesn't move, locked in its own glutinous mass. What did I do wrong? Was Hermione too young to use? Did I not knead it enough? Did I knead it too much? Did the weather affect my flour to water ratio? Did I leave out a cup of water inadvertently? At this point, according to Apollonia, I should trash the whole thing. But, not wanting to be wasteful, I persevere.

□The second rise seems to have done the dough some good. It's gone from a hard mass to a slightly lighter hard mass. It's time to get it ready to bake, but not before my favorite part—scoring the loaf. I'm addicted to YouTube videos of people slicing all sorts of beautiful designs into bread. I have a traditional lame and I make a nice deep cut going down the center. According to Apollonia, if my bread hasn't risen quite enough, a deep cut will help. I then make some light cuts on either side with hopes a nice leaf-like design will emerge.

□After fifty-five minutes, I realize I probably should have kept a better eye on it. The top has burnt a bit, but it doesn't look too bad. I'm sure Apollonia would drop kick it out of the window, but after schmearing a few slices with some French butter, no one in my house seems to be complaining.

WHAT'S IN A NAME

What's in a Name?

I realize I'm late to the Karen bashing party, but I was too reluctant to engage in the debate for fear of being labeled as one. You see, my name IS Karen and I've spent the last few

years apologizing for it. I've gotten in the habit of introducing myself as, "Karen, but one of the nice ones." It's a quick way to deflect any immediate profiling. But why Karen? How did that particular name become the pejorative term for an obnoxious white woman that flaunts her privilege with unreasonable demands? I know plenty of Lindas, and Susans, and one particular Debbie that can cause you to stick a needle in your eye as soon as their shrill voices hit the air. Their names could serve just the same purpose.

I know, I know—people love labels. They may be mean, but they're easy and get the point across quickly. But it made me start to think about names, how they shape us and how others judge us. I'm no angel in this respect either. For example, do you know any Ira's that are quarterbacks? Or have you met a Seymour that isn't an accountant? I'm sure there are thousands of Iras and Seymours that rightfully cringe at these presumptions. Names do bring along their own preconceived connotations, whether they are deserved or not.

Of course, there's more to a name than just our first names. How they fit with our last names really fleshes out a fuller picture. Mine is Katz, like the deli, not the Broadway musical. I share the same name with the recently retired CEO of Neiman Marcus, a successful children's book author, a book cover illustrator, and seventy-four other women living in Manhattan. I've toyed with the idea of starting a *Karen Katz Club* or making a documentary about people with the same name. How many Julia Roberts or Anne Hathaways are out there and how do their lives compare? Karen Katz might not be as ubiquitous as John Smith, but if you live in New York, you probably know one of us.

But I don't mind sharing my name. I like it. I like it a lot. It has a nice cadence to it. The crisp, hard sounds of the two "K's" back to back are strong and self-assured. Many people actually call me *KK*, as if I'm an agent from the forties

negotiating a deal with Louis B. Mayer. Or they call me *Double K* or *Katzala*. It's the kind of name that's just made for nicknames.

I can thank my mother for my first name, although I don't think she put a ton of thought into it. In the Jewish tradition, you're supposed to be named after a family member who has passed on. I was the third of three, so by the time I came along the only dead person's name left was my mom's grandfather Sam, *Schmuel* in Hebrew. He was a brusque, emotionless man from the old country and my mom had little affection for him. She didn't want to be constantly reminded of him, so she feminized Sam into Sue and that became my middle name. My Hebrew name was also feminized into *Schmuela*, causing some of my friends to tease me with the nickname, *Schmoo*, an unfortunate Yiddish word that means fool or jerk. Fortunately, it didn't stick.

My mother says she loved the name Carol, but that had been the name of my father's ex-girlfriend and she didn't want to be reminded of her either, so she felt the name Karen was close enough. My mom has a very thick Brooklyn accent seasoned with a touch of Long Island, so when she shortens my name in haste, it becomes *Kah*, the *a* drawn out nasally as in the word *gnat*. And if you shorten my last name too, the nickname becomes *KahKah*, not to be confused with *Caca*, the Spanish name for a certain body waste.

So I remain a founding member of the *Karen Katz Club*. My name is as much a part of me as my arm or leg or slightly chubby midsection. You can hear it easily over the loud speaker when you're getting called for your colonoscopy. People don't mangle it at the DMV. You can even convince people that you're related to the famous deli owner and that there's a sandwich named after you. It's called the *Katzala* and it's full of baloney.

My name is Karen Katz and I'm proud of it. But you can call me

KK because we're friends now.

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