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Liam Woodworth-Cook is an eclectic human from the Boston area. Having spent his twenties travelling in the States, Liam returned to Boston to finish his BFA in Creative Writing at Emerson College. A fan of jazz, the Grateful Dead, and the breaking of bread, Liam serves as the sous chef of Comfort Kitchen, in Upham's Corner, Dorchester. His travels have inspired his passion for stories, writing, and cooking.

Michael E. Thomas is a professional with real estate experience in both the private and public sector. In 2008, Michael founded his company, "The Urban Gardener Landscape Service, LLC." He provides a professional horticultural service for outdoor and indoor green spaces. Mr. Thomas is also a father of four and five grandchildren.

Joanne Petit-Frere is a visionary & sculptor, with a focus on artifacting hair-craft and braids across diverse storytelling mediums. Joanne's work has graced in Vogue Italia, Art Forum, the Philbrook Museum and more. She is the founder of JoGoesWest Studios.

Biplaw Rai is a Nepali-born culinary entrepreneur, restaurant owner, and CEO, dedicated to building community through food. In 2023, his latest venture Comfort Kitchen opened to great excitement and greater acclaim: named "Best New Restaurant" by Boston Magazine and the Boston Globe, one of the top 50 in the country by the New York Times, and nominated for Best New Restaurant by the James Beard Foundation.

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John Santos
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Maria Garcia
interview by Jard Lerebours

Biplaw Rai
interview by Alula Hunsen

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EDITOR'S NOTE
AIuIa Hunsen

ChanneI 2: PIenty started as a germ of an idea, emerging from a smaII book project we put out two years ago caIIed ChanneI 1: BIiss: a few staff at the Boston Ujima Project thought it might be worthwhiIe to take a moment to sIow down, step out of the feigned-urgency we often feeI in non-profit workpIaces, and ask one another–where do you find bIiss? What makes you happy, on a day-to-day basis? AImost everyone we asked mentioned food.

Food of course can bring deIight and joy, even durationaI and Ionger Iasting feeIings of fuIfiIIment; but it is aIso a means by which we IiteraIIy fiII ourseIves back up, and sustain our output–more to the point, cooking and/or eating are daiIy practices for everyone, practices enacted by many smaII businesses in our community and more than a few home cooks who provide for them and theirs.

So, we decided to open the scope, foIIowing our inquiry further and asking specific questions about how we reIate to sustenance to workers and owners in Ujima's Good Business AIIiance; and to everyday members who we Iove and who sustain our work.

Inside this cook-book-adjacent zine, you'II find stories, recipes, and images that center necessities and frivoIities in cuisine, aIongside cuIture and economic deveIopment narratives that arise from food as business and as connector of peopIe. We hope that you cook these recipes with us, visit our restaurants and grocers to partake in our IocaI food economies and ecosystems, and share this zine with your Ioved ones.

In soIidarity,
AIuIa Hunsen

THE CHEFS

SO FRESH, SO CLEAN

Maria Garcia in conversation with
Jard Lerebours

Fresh Food Generation is a Dorchester based restaurant, food truck and catering company that recreates Caribbean and Southern flavors using high quality New England ingredients. Founded in 2015, they are driven by the belief that good food should be accessible in every neighborhood, which is why they opened their first restaurant in Codman Square.

On February 19th, writer and Ujima member Jard Lerebours sat down with Maria, a cook at Ujima Good Business Alliance member Fresh Food Generation, to discuss her love of pastries and her experience working as a cook at Fresh Food Generation. Jard has always been a fan of the ubiquitous Caribbean fusion restaurant. After all, Caribbean cuisine is a fusion itself: a stew of enslaved African, Arawak Indigenous and European colonizer recipes and ingredients.

Maria affectionately refers to Fresh Food Generation as her second home. The owners of Fresh Food Generation: Cassandra and Jackson have cultivated an equitable space in which culinary teams are paid beyond the living wage rate and actively encouraged Maria in her pursuit of a high school diploma. In a world where productivity and efficiency is centered, it's important to maintain spaces in which we are regarded holistically with empathy, care and consideration. In their conversation, Maria spoke about helping her mother prepare Christmas cakes in Cape Verde, going back to school, and her favorite dishes.

Jard Lerebours: What's your favorite dish to make in the kitchen?

Maria Garcia: I used to make mac and cheese, and bean stew. Before, I used to make Chipotle sauce and jerk sauce, honey dressing, balsamic dressing, collared greens, rice, baked chicken, lots of things; sliders like burger sliders, chicken sliders, brownies. I do almost everything. For Christmas, my mother used to make a cake for the community because she had a small oven. Every family didn't have an oven at home, so my mother used to make cakes for the community. She used to make cakes for like 20 families.

Wow.

M: I remember that from December 22nd to the 31st in my house, there was a lot of cake everywhere. I remember this time all the time because it was a lot of work and I was 12 or 13 years old but I helped my mother a lot. It's a simple cake. It's a cake that you can take with coffee in the morning. But it's a tradition in Cape Verde that everybody has a small cake. The poorest family should have a small cake at home. This was part of the celebration of Christmas. It's something that I remember from like 35 years ago and that's why now I like to work in the kitchen. I like to cook but pastries are my favorite.

JL: Thank you for sharing that. How do you make the cake? What's the recipe?

M: The original recipe from my mother was 18 grams of flour, 10 eggs, 18 grams of sugar, 2 spoons of baking powder, 1 coffee spoon of salt and 1.5 spoons of vanilla.

And then to make the cake, she used to beat the eggs separately. First, she mixed the sugar and the egg yolk and then the egg whites separately. And when she mixed, the cake was very big and like a sponge. The flavor was very, very good.

JL: Do you still eat the cake every year for Christmas?

M: I do every year. Yeah. <laughs>.

JL: What do you love the most about pastries?

M: I don't know how to explain that because it's something that I feel…I don't know how to <laugh>. I like the challenges because it's something that you have to learn a lot to make good pastries and every time you have a new experience. It's something that makes me happy to work on. I don't have the opportunity yet to work on that but whenever I have the opportunity to make some pastries, I do it and I love it. Yeah.

JL: That's beautiful. I'm wondering, how did you come into culinary work in the first place?

M: I started to work in the kitchen because in my country I did another thing. And when I started here, it was in 2016 when I came here. From there, I worked in [almost] every restaurant in Boston. I've been here at Fresh Food Generation for five years and two months. I started here in 2019.

JL: How would you describe Fresh Food Generation and what they prioritize?

M: Fresh Food Generation is like my second home. I like to work here because I feel that I'm a part of this project. Cassandra and Jackson always motivate me to improve my knowledge. In 2020, I feel that I need to learn English, to improve my English. I went to school and this year I finished high school.

I'm very thankful for Jackson and Cassandra because they always gave me a chance to go to school, and worked out a schedule so that I can go to school and still make my 40 hours a week. They pushed me a lot to finish my education.

JL: What dishes at Fresh Food Generation do you enjoy the most?

M: I like the jerk chicken a lot, but I don't eat too much because it's too spicy. I like bean stew too. I like oxtail. It's a dish that I'm not very good at making but I like it a lot. And somebody here does it very well and the flavor is very good. But I like every dish we make because they're delicious.

GINGER

RECIPE: GINGER BEER
Recipe from Lorraine St. Victor

Ingredients:
Fresh ginger root (about 2–3 inches), grated or blended
4–5 cups water
Optional aromatics (use one or mix a few):
Orange peel
Lime peel
Whole cloves
Allspice berries
Sweetener of choice, to taste (honey, sugar, agave, etc.)

For carbonation (choose one option):
Sparkling water
Carbonated water (from SodaStream or similar)
Ginger bug (for natural fermentation)
Champagne yeast (optional, for a drier fizz)

Instructions:

01. Peel the ginger, then grate it finely or blend it with a little water.

02. In a pot, combine the ginger, water, and any aromatics. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 10–20 minutes, depending on desired strength.

03. Strain thoroughly.

04. Remove from heat and strain very well using a fine-mesh strainer or cheesecloth. The liquid should be smooth, with no pulp or spice sediment.

05. Sweeten to taste while warm. Let the tea cool completely before adding bubbles.

Carbonation

Option A: Sparkling Water

06. Once the tea is fully cooled, mix 1 part ginger tea with 1–2 parts cold sparkling water.

07. Stir gently and serve immediately.

Option B: Carbonated Water (SodaStream Method)

08. Chill the strained ginger tea.

09. Carbonate plain water only.

10. Mix carbonated water with the ginger tea just before serving.

Option C: Natural Fermentation

11. Make sure the tea is fully cooled and lightly sweetened (sugar is needed for carbonation).

12. Add 2–3 tablespoons of ginger bug.

13. Transfer to swing-top bottles, leaving 1–2 inches of headspace.

14. Let ferment at room temperature for 24–48 hours, checking daily and opening to burp it (this ensures the pressure doesn't build up in the bottle).

15. Refrigerate once bubbly. Open carefully.

BEER

COMFORT KITCHEN
Liam Woodworth-Cook

NestIed in Upham's Corner Dorchester, Comfort Kitchen is an intimate and IiveIy restaurant serving brunch on the weekend and dinner at night with a fuII bar and outdoor patio. Their food is a ceIebration of the ingredients and fIavors of the African diaspora connected from Asia to the Americas, gIobaI comfort food.

POSTSHIFT COOKS SHUFFLE TO A WATERING HOLE

HeeIs pierced we sIump onto stooIs–
our eyes gIaze the menu.
Eight hours of coffee and not enough water has haIIowed us into husks.
We order beers aIongside whiskey. Tucking ourseIves into a Iost normaIcy found with each sip–we nibbIe caIamari. The stomach-temperamentaI–reworks its deprived state as it fiIIs with spirit. We have done this
to ourseIves again. Amongst footbaII banter from teIevisions
and Tuesday afternoon drinkers, the hum of evening pub
covers us, as we discuss: the tasks of tomorrow, the cutting of fish,
the preparation of stew. A quarter fed, we renew our gIasses.
SaIut.

COOKING
OriginaIIy written 12/9/2003
(at 9 years oId)

It was my Mom's birthday. My famiIy got into our Subaru and drove my dad to work, because he needed to get to work and our Buick Century is bad in the snow. When we were driving, I had a choice. I couId go on a waIk with Mom or cook with Dad. I chose to cook–I Iove cooking! My Dad cooks at S.S.J.E., that means Society of Saint John the EvangeIist. They are Monks. When we got there, my Dad forgot to give me an apron, but he [eventuaIIy] remembered.

I'II Iist some things I did:

- I peeIed roasted onions–sIimey, "eww";
- I got uncooked shrimp from the waIk-in (a Iarge refrigerator that you can waIk into);
- and I had a very big job. I was supposed to fetch bread from Darwin's, a shop in Harvard Square where my Dad works.

He gave me $5.00, his ceII phone, a map so I couId get to Darwin's, and his and my Mom's phone #s if I needed to caII them. I think I caIIed my Dad twice to see if I had the money and to teII him where I was. Once I got there, I couId not find the money in my pants pocket, but the Iady was nice enough to write it down on a receipt so my Dad wiII pay the next time. I ran to the Monastery but I was Iocked out because the code on the door was kind of frozen, or something. I don't reaIIy know. I rang the doorbeII after I tried to jump the fence. My Dad came out and he was surprised to see me because he thought I was a IittIe farther

I REMEMBER MY FASCINATION ENTERING MY FIRST WALK-IN. THE FANS WHIRRING, THE RACKS EITHER SIDE OF ME, FILLED WITH PRODUCE. HOW I JOKED AS A CHILD THAT MY FATHER'S LAST NAME WAS COOK AND HE WAS A COOK. A CHEF.

back. We came in and finished the job for the day and we went off to meet my Mom at Darwin's. This was my second time cooking at the monastery and it was extraordinary!

POSTSCRIPT
5/8/2025

My father sent me this text via a typed page in April of this year. It was striking to reread. My casual dismissal of my mother's birthday as a mere happenstance-as if to say, "It was snowing." I still struggle with the spelling of "receipt." I have no recollection of its writing, though I do remember bits of the adventure. I remember my father drawing a map of the best route (two or so blocks) from the monastery to the Darwin's location on Mt. Auburn. The weight of an important task. The childlike awkwardness.

My father cooked at that monastery for 14 years, and would typically take an afternoon stroll for espresso and baguettes-on one of these fateful strolls, he met Biplaw Rai, who managed Darwin's at the time. Their meeting and subsequent friendship has led to me, twenty-two years later, becoming sous chef of Comfort Kitchen, Biplaw's current project.

The roots run deep. I remember my fascination entering my first walk-in. The fans whirring, the racks either side of me, filled with produce. How I joked as a child that my father's last name was Cook and he was a cook. A chef. How I now wear clogs for most of the week, clad daily in baggy pants (comfortable given the heat of the stove and oven at my kneeside). A trail of footsteps in December sludge leading to a place of comfort where I am continually growing. Where now, I cherish holding a roasted onion. Inhaling the depths of layers, the memories of smell-the ruckus of pans clanging with my father on an impromptu jam-a foundation of my life, humoring and seasoned.

MASALA BROWN BUTTER OKRA

RECIPE: MASALA BROWN BUTTER OKRA
Recipe from Biplaw Rai and Shelley Nason

Comfort Kitchen's Masala Brown Butter Okra is a delicious appetizer and regular order for many patrons, bringing elements and food lineages from across Africa and South Asia onto one easy, light-yet-still-rich plate.

Ingredients:
½ lb okra, stems trimmed
4 oz butter
2 Tbsp garam masala
1 tsp kosher salt
1/2 cup masala yogurt
1/4 cup crumbled plantain chips

MASALA YOGURT
1 cup full fat Greek yogurt
1 Tbsp garam masala spice blend
1 lemon, juice + zest
1 tsp kosher salt
Combine all ingredients in a mixing bowl and whisk until fully incorporated.

Instructions:
01. Heat a large sauté pan over medium or high heat with 1 tbsp canola oil. When the oil is hot add your okra in a single layer. Do not stack okra or they will steam and not sear.
02. Sear okra until they begin to color.
03. Add the butter, salt, and garam masala.
04. Cook until the butter browns and the okra becomes tender, or about 10 minutes. Remove from heat.

To plate:
To 4 small plates add 2 table spoons of the masala yogurt to the center of the plate and spread in a circle. Divide the okra between the plates stacking on top of each other. Add the crumbled plantains on top. Serve and enjoy.

THE HOME COOKS

HORTICULTURALIST
Michael Thomas

a home can be a world

We are a product of our food environment. I grew up in a healthy family living in the Malcolm X Park section of Roxbury. My grandparents were Black southerners of the Great (American) Migration from Alabama and North Carolina, by way of Pittsburg, PA. They raised their four young children (three boys and my mom, the youngest and only girl) all 'up North' in Boston, MA. We experienced a close-knit family lifestyle among aunties and uncles. My cousins were my closest friends. We were not the type of family that traveled regularly with connections to Southern family roots. We grew up in an urban Boston culture where cooking fresh meals daily for the family was typical. We had to be on time for dinner with our hands and face washed!

My grandparents lived in a quaint three-story, single-family house on Marcellar St. in Roxbury, a ten-minute bike ride from my home. It was a small home with a modest plot of land secluded by a cluster of tall oak trees. Every holiday my sister and I along with four cousins would gather for fresh home-cooked food, Pokeno, and laughter. Descending down the narrow driveway from the rugged two-way street, the daylilies, hosta, rose bushes, and more were always attentive to our presence. We played basketball on the hoop grandad installed; raced down the driveway using his four-wheeled dolly and Nana's old wheel chairs; and marveled at all his welding tools and equipment. As a manchild, growing up in Nana's yard and garden, just beyond the rough main streets, was a priceless gem that has sustained my joy of food and nature. There were plants in abundance, both indoors and outside. It was our garden oasis in the middle of Roxbury.

Nana was my inspiration for food and plants. She cooked, gardened, and cleaned; she also helped my grandfather run his welding business, and she was a head nurse at a Roxbury nursing home on Howland Street. Her yard and garden were beautiful; and we enjoyed her fresh produce harvested at every holiday meal. Nana grew zucchini, summer squash, tomatoes, beans, and more. Grandfather planted a pear tree, a plum, and a cherry tree. Every year we youngsters would climb atop grandfather's big white pickup truck with the elevated racks to pick the juiciest cherries for Nana to cook her delicious cherry cobbler.

As time passed, sharing food together as a family has been important for conveying family values and culture. With Boston's ever changing population of people, my new and growing young family embraced various foods and traditions. These moments with my wife and four children have generated lively conversations about the history of the world. Their palate has a natural appetite for fresh food and grains. The children are very healthy and whole individuals that are allowed to have a variety of culinary experiences. When they were young, breakfast was our most memorable occasion. It was a wonderful time to meet together on weekends and relax early mornings, awakened by the fresh smell of breakfast, and the sun.

The summer of my 14th birthday I was hired, by my dad, as a busboy in the North-eastern EL Center food court. The following semester, he assigned me as the short-order breakfast cook for the law school students, on Sundays. This was the beginning of my love

AS A MANCHILD, GROWING UP IN NANA'S YARD AND GARDEN, JUST BEYOND THE ROUGH MAIN STREETS, WAS A PRICELESS GEM THAT HAS SUSTAINED MY JOY OF FOOD AND NATURE.

for cooking breakfast. The joy of preparing the food to perfection, and then witnessing the satisfaction of those eating the food I prepared gave me pride and determination. It was a natural talent. I recalled the experiences from my earlier childhood when my mom and my nana cooked breakfast. I remembered the smells of butter warming in the pan ready for pancakes, the sizzling of Paul Parks beef sausage patty's, and the moisture evaporating from the scrambled eggs. Cooking breakfast became fun.

Cooking pancakes made from scratch is one of my favorite recipes. When the grandchildren visit overnight, they anticipate bright mornings with hot breakfast with pancakes in the morning, before an adventurous day. Generally, I use whole wheat flour and mix in fresh blueberries or sliced bananas. Alternatively, I used to blend the banana in the mix first; now, I decided on thin slices, instead. Married and having raised four children, I am still cooking breakfast for the next generation of grandchildren; and my children have mastered their own pancake recipes.

RECIPE: BLUEBERRY PANCAKES

Cooking pancakes made from scratch is one of my favorite recipes. When the grandchildren visit overnight, they anticipate bright mornings with hot breakfast with pancakes in the morning, before an adventurous day. Generally, I use whole wheat flour and mix in fresh blueberries or sliced bananas. Alternatively, I used to blend the banana in the mix first; now, I decided on thin slices, instead. Married and having raised four children, I am still cooking breakfast for the next generation of grandchildren; and my children have mastered their own pancake recipes.

Ingredients:

1 cup flour
3 pinches salt
1 teaspoon baking soda
2 pinches cinnamon powder
1 egg
1 cup milk
A dash of maple syrup
2 tablespoons melted butter

Blueberries (optional)
Banana slices (optional)
Butter (for serving)
Maple syrup (for serving)
Molasses (for serving)
Fruit preserve (for serving)

Instructions:

For my pancake recipe, the trick is always to get the batter mixture well balanced so that the texture of the pancakes are slightly moist, not too stiff, and not too fat. If they're too fat, they will absorb too much syrup. For the ratio of ingredients: I will start mixing the dry ingredients of one cup of flour; three pinches of salt; one teaspoon of baking soda; and two pinches of cinnamon powder. Next, I'll mix one egg; one cup of milk; a dash of male syrup, and two tablespoons of melted butter. Combine dry ingredients with wet ingredients. Adding the melted butter into the batter enhances the flavor and also makes the pancakes moist. I never use margarine. A little bit of fat is good for us.

When cooking on the stove, I use a cast-iron skillet for the even distribution of heat in the pan–when the grandchildren visit I use two skillets cooking three pancakes in each pan for quicker cooking time. Once the pan is hot enough, I add butter to the pan and pour half-a- ladle full of batter into the pan before the butter burns too much. Then immediately, I sprinkle some blueberries or banana slices on top of each pancake. It is important to monitor the heat of the pan by the pancake cooking time. If the pan is not hot enough, the pancakes cook too slow and spread into one another; if it's too hot they will burn. Wait for bubbles to rise to the top of each pancake before flipping it over. Serve warm with a slice of butter and real maple syrup, molasses, and/or a fruit preserve.

ARTIST
Joanne Petit-Frere

park slope tree house

One of the most freshest experiences I've ever had was sitting in a treehouse – a brownstone treehouse in ParkSlope – during a summer rainstorm. Surrounded by groves of trees, with large bay windows and just enough cracked open to smell the mist of the collective rain on wood. Sitting in my room, while home-sitting - with my braids laid out on my favorite magic braided black jute rug, I thought of what meal would best compliment this scenario. One that was simple, fresh, tasty w/ a splashy kinda kick.

I've been mostly pescatarian and have always been a pasta kinda girl, so that's my comfort zone. What started in the summer, has turned into an all-year-round herb for me and thus cilantro, as more than mere garnish. And cheese, well - I wanted something that wasn't as heavy as a parm - or as robust, but a texture that was more present than flavor. So cotija was a nice compliment, especially when activated with the sprinkled lemon juice. Then **voilà**.

LEMON BLACK PEPPER SEARED SALMON & SPAGHETTI

RECIPE: LEMON BLACK PEPPER SEARED SALMON & SPAGHETTI

Ingredients:

Spaghetti
Olive oil
Salmon steak
Black pepper
Lemon (or lemon juice)
Cilantro
Cotija cheese

Instructions:

01. Put spaghetti in boiling water, and cook for 4-6 minutes al dente - add a bit of olive oil, drain and rinse 3x.

02. Heat a pan on medium heat for about 3 minutes, then place olive oil-coated salmon steak on a bed in the pan of black pepper, salt and lemon juice.

03. Cook for about 4min on each side, or until preferred blackened crisp.

04. Chop generous amounts of cilantro as a small salad to dress the dish once salmon and spaghetti are ready.

05. Sprinkle cotija cheese on spaghetti, and additional lemon juice all over dish.


THE
GROCERS

GOOD FOR YOU AND GOOD TO YOU

John Santos, in conversation with
Bex OIuwatoyin Thompson

The Dorchester Food Co-op is a community & worker-owned grocery store that makes healthy food accessible and advances economic opportunity through neighborhood engagement.

The Dorchester Food Co-op is also a diverse inclusive community with opportunities for employment, ownership, and access to healthy food. As a food co-op, they serve and reflect the wide variety of cultural, racial, and socio-economic groups that make up their neighborhood.

On a cloudy fall afternoon, Bex Thompson pulled up to an Ujima Cafe gathering at Dorchester Food Co-op with a friend and an empty stomach. After a long day, the promise of a meal and friendly conversation materialized in front of her through the smell of charcoal smoke and the sound of laughter from people sitting at picnic tables outside the co-op. Before dining with old and new friends, she went to the co-op's cafe counter to grab some rice and beans from Keisha O'Neal, the store's front end manager, then made a beeline for the grill to top off her plate with a slice of chicken and an ear of corn from John Santos, the co-op's former general manager and occasional grillmaster. As she waited for her serving, John introduced himself and shared a bit about the co-op's mission to make vegan and organic food accessible to Dorchester's predominantly Black and Brown low-income community, and the different strategies they implement to reach that goal.

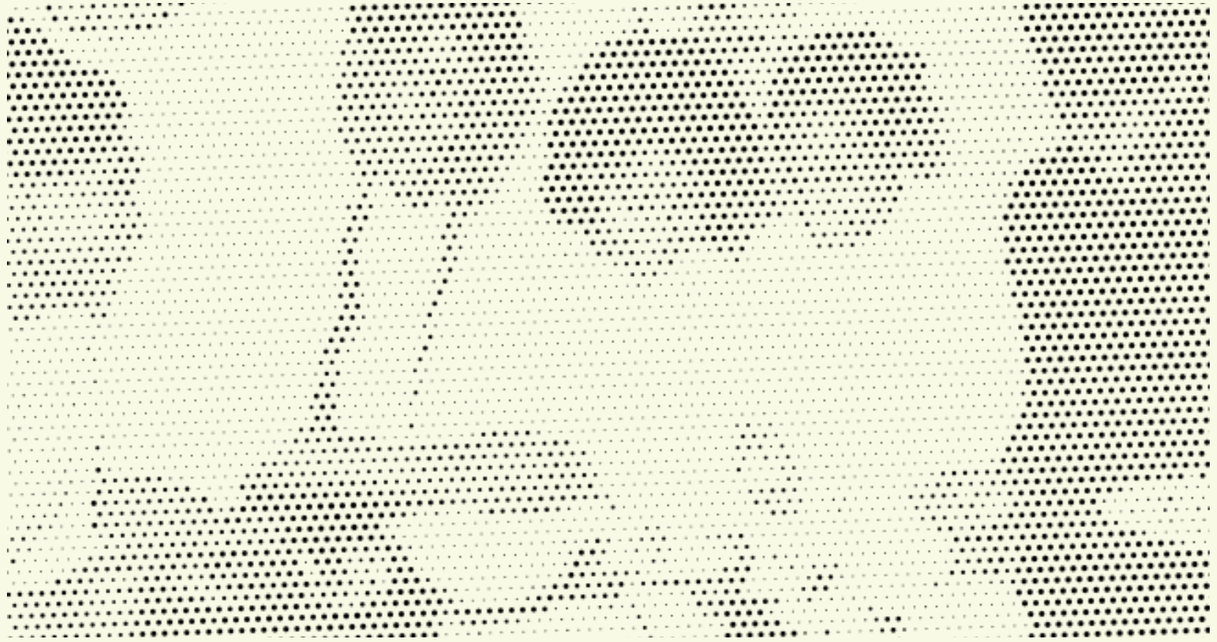
After over 45 years of food retail experience-holding leadership and general managing positions in places like Bread & Circus (which later became Whole Foods Market), Tropical Foods in Roxbury, and Urban Greens Food Co-op in Providence-John retired from Dorchester Food Co-op last December. A few months before his departure, Bex had a chance to sit down with him again and chat about the co-op's roots, its role in Dorchester's food ecosystem, and its creative strategies amidst financial struggle. These days John says he's working on a few projects, but the most interesting is being a babysitter for his grandkids.

Bex Thompson: When and why was the Dorchester Food Co-op founded?

John Santos: Back in 2011, there were a couple of folks in Dorchester that felt like the community was lacking locally grown, nutritious foods that focused on health and wellness. Jenny Silverman, one of our founders, approached Harvest Co-op (a natural foods consumer cooperative based in Jamaica Plain and Cambridge until going out of business in 2018) and asked them if they could open a location in Dorchester, and they said no. So she began to explore the possibilities and asked members of the community if they were interested. It turned out many people believed, like Jenny did, that Dorchester would be a perfect place for a co-op. There was a lot of activity that happened on a grassroots level–including marching in parades and working farmers' markets–that led to Dorchester Food Co-Op's founding. It was a long effort that resulted in us officially opening this store in partnership with the Vietnamese American Initiative for Development (VietAID, a community development corporation focusing its work on Fields Corners' Vietnamese community) in October 2023. We're located on the first floor of 195 Bowdoin Street as the retail space for this development, and there are 41 low-income housing apartment units above us.

BT: How does your co-op define local?

JS: We consider everything within a hundred miles of our store "local," and the radius is that large for several reasons. First, Boston doesn't have a lot of open farmland. Many, many years ago there was a lot of



cattle grazing here in Dorchester, but today you have to go out to Western Mass, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine to find that. So some of our beef, goat meat, and lamb come from Western Mass. Second, we have certain quality standards that reduce the number of locations we can buy our produce from. Factors that influence these standards include how farm staff are treated, how the animals are treated, and the processes by which produce is grown. For example, the majority of our beef comes from Cutting Hill Beef in Vermont because it's an organic farm. Third, we have a little bit of a disadvantage because we're on the coast. The ocean cuts off half the sources we could have drawn from if we were further inland, so that's why we draw our radius for "local" so wide.

With that being said, there are people within a 20-minute drive that we buy from. A lot of these folks may be sourcing their ingredients from outside of Boston, but they're producing goods here in our community. One that comes to mind is Boston Vegan, a woman-owned company based in Newton, Massachusetts. It's a great mom-and-pop operation. One day the owner brought me her products to try, and there was so much stuff coming into the store at the time that I just put it in the storage freezer and ended up forgetting it was there. A month later she calls, "Hey, by the way, did you try my product? What do you think?"

And I'm like, "Listen, I gotta tell you, I didn't try it yet. It's been sitting in the store freezer. It's 10 o'clock at night, I'm gonna go home now. When I get home, I'm gonna cook it, and I'll give you feedback tomorrow."

By the way, I'm a meat eater. I'm a butcher by trade. I eat vegetarian and vegan products also, but it's not what I know. Anyways, when I got home I put two patties into a frying pan, and the first thing I noticed was they weren't shrinking; patties typically get smaller when you cook them. But because there was no animal fat, which typically burns off in the cooking process, there's nothing to shrink. I'm getting to eat 100% of what I bought. So, okay, check mark–value added right there. But I'm like, this is gonna taste like cardboard. I cut into it with my fork, and I'm like "Wait a minute, this is really good." I ate one patty by itself, and I put cheese on the other (totally not vegan) and made a burger.

I had to call her immediately. It was 11 o'clock by that time and I was thinking to myself, 'She's gonna hate me, but I'm gonna call her anyways.' She answered and I said, "Listen, I had to call you because one, I was ashamed that I hadn't tried your product for a month, and two, your product is amazing. Not only are we gonna carry your product, we're gonna incorporate it into our empanadas because I've been trying to make a vegan empanada." This is what we're capable of doing as a local co-op. If we were Stop & Shop or Market Basket, these types of decisions would have to go through a lot of red tape, and it wouldn't be so simple to support a local business like this.

BT: Can you speak a little bit more about the co-op's mission to make healthy food accessible to the Dorchester community?

JS: It's a challenging effort, but I feel called to do this because I think I understand

AS A CO-OP, WE HAVE TO PAY OUR BILLS, AND WE ALSO HAVE TO ANSWER TO OUR BOSSES: 2,500 HOUSEHOLDS. THERE ISN'T A CEO SITTING IN AUSTIN, TEXAS.

what people are going through, and I'm less concerned about having gourmet food on the shelf. Those factors mean less to me than improving people's access to determining the foods they wanna eat. That's really what it comes down to. If you are Latinx, you are gonna want white rice. And there's gonna be people that are gonna tell you that's a high-carb food; that it's not great for your blood sugar and all these things. It may not be healthy food, but it's culturally relevant food to you. What I wanna do is maybe get you exposed to organic white rice and then maybe introduce you to other grains to make your favorite dishes with. Maybe instead of using rice, we're using quinoa or barley as an alternative. Something that's a little more nutritious, higher in protein, and won't affect sugar levels.

These solutions are nice in theory, but I know that people have to connect with it. It's gotta make sense. With the cafe area inside our co-op, we put these ideas into action by introducing these ingredients to people in their cooked form. All of a sudden, substituting healthier alternatives to classic, cultural meals no longer feels like a far-fetched idea for our consumers.

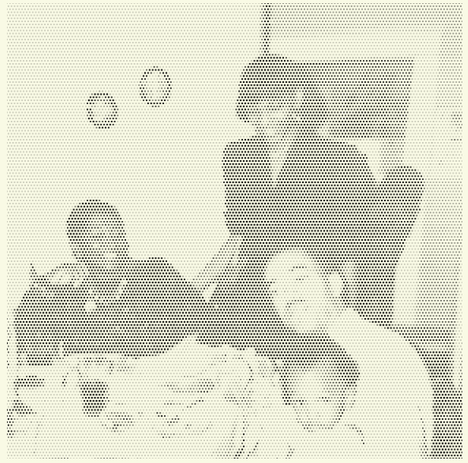
This is the type of thinking behind that vegan empanada I mentioned. Remember, vegan beef doesn't shrink, so our empanadas are packed full. You can't find an empanada like ours anywhere in Boston.

BT: How do you all manage to meet the economic demands of a small business while honoring your commitments to collective ownership and ethical consumption?

JS: In our industry, the people that make money are usually in the middle–the distributors in between the growers/manufacturers and the retailers. The retailers [like Dorchester Food Co-op] are automatically placed in a competitive situation. Once they take on the product, oftentimes they own it, so any losses incurred are incurred by the retailer. They're not incurred by the distributor. And the manufacturer or the grower, they're subject to issues regarding weather, fuel charges, or import expenses, which also creates losses for them. So the grower is on one end absorbing losses, the retailer is on the other end absorbing losses, and the people in the middle are like, "As long as this product is moving, we're making money. And if the product isn't moving, well, we're not losing money." Because of economic conditions behind the scenes like this, we run into challenges when we're pricing our products and trying to meet our bottom line.

For instance, there's a woman that grows these beautiful herbs, and she's used to selling these herbs at the farmer's market. At a farmer's market, a farmer can charge a premium [to cover any additional costs that come along with growing and distributing a product] because their product isn't being compared to much else. Customers also have conversations with them–listening to the farmer and the farm's personal history and learning about how the product was grown–so there's a lot of value added in the present moment.

In a retail store, that doesn't exist. The first thing a customer is doing is comparing the price of a product across different retailers. They're not thinking



about the farmer because the farmer's not in front of them, so there's no value added component. So pricing products to account for the costs and losses incurred throughout the growing and distribution process doesn't necessarily work in the supermarket context.

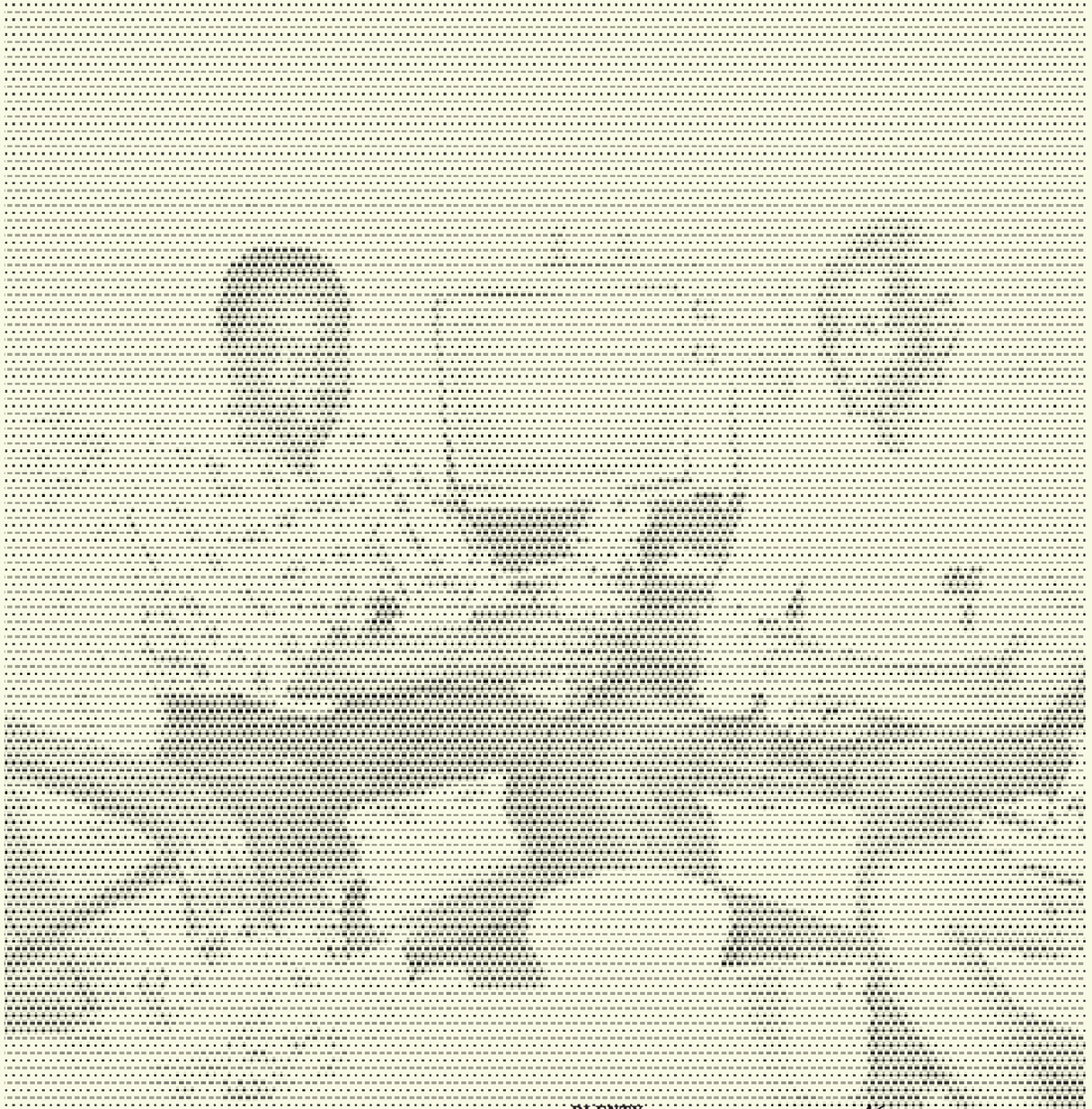
As a co-op, we have to pay our bills, and we also have to answer to our bosses: 2,500 households. There isn't a CEO sitting in Austin, Texas, or a board of directors somewhere that's made up of people that have spent years making money. Our board is the mom down the street, the school teacher, the carpenter. It's folks that know very little about our industry. And it becomes very challenging for somebody like me, because I have to speak their language and I have to help them understand the dynamics and the pressures that we're under. I have to reconcile the mission of a co-op versus the economics of a business.

It's very difficult because when you introduce a business like ours in a community like Dorchester, there isn't an immediate recognition of value. For immigrants in our community, the idea of organic (most of the products we sell) as a differentiator doesn't mean anything because everything in their home country's open market is organic. What is the point of paying more for an "organic" product? The assumption is 'food is food.' There is a difference, though.

For example, a lot of people buy water-added chicken from other retailers. It looks like more meat for a cheaper cost, but that's only because it's been injected with a pump-full of water. It's cheap until you're preparing it, because that water eventually cooks out, so you're actually getting less than what you paid for. You should measure your food based on what you get to eat–not what you bought, not what you went home with, but what actually ended up in your stomach. I could also add health into that. You have to ask yourself, "What did that food cost me?" We have to re-educate the American consumer on how to properly assess food.

Ultimately, we had to get creative to shore up our financial situation, so we became a U-Haul dealer. We need to go buy goods from time to time, but we can't afford a truck. So by becoming a neighborhood U-Haul dealer we could rent a truck to ourselves and members of our community who needed it. We have to do this in order to provide enough money toward our bottom line. We're not anywhere near breaking even. The amount of money we're losing on a weekly and monthly basis is astounding. But we're making a contribution to the community.

We started off with two trucks. People started liking to rent from us because we're in the business of providing customer service. We say, "Hi, how are you? Would you like a cup of coffee while we get you rented? Why don't you try an empanada? They're amazing." The customer service we've provided has been so much higher than anybody else in our area that all of a sudden we go from having two trucks in our lot to 20. There are 21,000 U-Haul dealers in the United States and Canada, and we're ranked number two out of all of them for our customer service. This lady wrote this review about how we are good for the community because when people walk into our store, they're visible. In this predominantly Latinx community, the



African Americans that live here can feel excluded from this community. Keisha, my front end manager, tells me, "I'm here for my people." It's shocking to me because I'm thinking 'This is a BIPOC community, of course everybody's being treated the same here.' But there's so much invisible racism that exists in all shades and languages.

For us, it's not just about the food on the shelf, it's about validating the community. On Saturdays I have a big barbecue. There's this one guy who comes every Saturday just to eat our roasted chicken and our grilled corn and have a conversation. One day he says, "You know, you need to go to the city and ask for money."

And I'm like, "Why?"

He says, "Since you guys have been here, the crime rate has gone down. There have been no shootings on this block, no murders on this block, which has not been the case for the years prior. The co-op has created this space of safety and wellness. It's visible. People don't wanna act up here. It's an element of support for the community. That deserves to be recognized and supported."

VEGAN

RECIPE: VEGAN EMPANADA
Dorchester Food Co-Op's empanadas are a healthy crowd-favorite, served in their café daily for co-op members and passersby alike; they've lit up many a gathering. Enjoy these at home if you'd like, but make sure to grab your ingredients from Dorchester Food Co-Op at 195 Bowdoin St.

Ingredients:
Olive oil
4 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
1 pound of Boston Vegan Ground Vegan Meat Crumble
Salt
Black pepper
Mixed seasoning (garlic powder, onion powder, oregano, paprika)
1 cup of red cabbage, shredded
1 cup of green cabbage, shredded
½ medium red bell pepper, finely diced
½ medium yellow bell pepper, finely diced
½ medium green bell pepper, finely diced
1 medium red onion, finely diced
Oregano
Empanada dough discos
All-purpose flour, for empanada folding
Vegetable oil

Instructions:
01. Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat.

02. Add the garlic and stir until lightly golden.

03. Then, add the vegan meat crumble, and season with salt, black pepper, and mixed seasoning.

04. After 8-10 minutes, add the red and green cabbage to the skillet and mix well.

05. Cook the meat and cabbage for 15 more minutes, stirring the mixture occasionally.

06. Add a dash of oregano and the diced bell peppers and onion to the mixture and only cook for 3-5 more minutes to preserve their crunch.

07. Turn off the stove and set the empanada filling aside to cool down.

08. When the filling has cooled down, you can start to form the empanadas. Grab a dough disco and sprinkle a little bit of flour on each side. Then scoop some of the filling onto one half of the circle, leaving enough room for the disco to be folded shut. You want the empanada to be packed with filling, but not too full that it breaks apart during frying. Fold the disco dough over to create a half circle and use a fork to seal the edges.

09. In a large Dutch oven or heavy bottom pot, heat about 2 inches of vegetable oil over medium-high heat.

10. Depending on their size, carefully place 3-4 empanadas into the oil at a time.

11. Turn them frequently for about 4-5 minutes, and remove them from the oil after they've turned golden brown.

12. Transfer the empanadas to a wire rack to drain any excess oil. Serve warm.

EMPANADA

NUBIAN MARKETS

Ismail Samad

Nubian Markets is food sovereignty in practice. As one of our latest additions to the Ujima Good Business Alliance (UGBA), the business ensures that local food producers and consumers have a place and space to meet one another, build relationships, and support an internally-facing economy.

With a small but diverse selection of groceries, Nubian Markets serves Nubian Square's needs for a grocer which stocks halal national and international Black cuisine staples. Co-founder Ismail Samad spoke on Nubian Markets' operations and approach last winter; we're reproducing this interview in an as-told-to format to capture the story he wove.

A lot of different things came together at the same time to make [Nubian Markets] happen. First, to think about Nubian Markets, you have to think about Nubian Square–and to think about Nubian Square, you have to think about the energy that it takes to keep legacy residents here, to preserve history. There were people who, early on, recognized the impending investment which would be coming into the Square, and they began to organize around preserving Black history here–I'm thinking about Chris and Kai with Black Market, and other community organizers that championed the campaign to change the name of the Square in the first place [from Dudley to Nubian].

Around the time of the name change [in 2018], I was working with Commonwealth Kitchen to support food businesses and get 'em scaled up; and we were looking not just at products, but at strategies to get them connected with some of the anchor institutions. The idea here was: if you have a food product, then you could get into, say, Boston Medical Center and scale up that way, by being at all of their hospital beds and being in their cafeteria. Through that work, I built a relationship with folks over at Boston Medical Center, because we were trying to figure out economic scaling opportunities for people of color who have product companies.

We were really trying to fight, within structures, the racism that exists within buying practices and food service companies that typically contract with institutions. Here we're talking about how these big food management companies with institutional ties build up an exclusive buying power that prioritizes products that are already scaled, fitting within a system that was built to make certain stakeholders money. In this context, how many upstart Black-owned companies can actually be plugged into a system that was built for companies that are already at scale? It became very difficult to see a pathway; we did pilots upon pilots.

But we want to see what we can change when we're inside, dealing with all of the complexities that have resulted from us being shipped over here, dealing with the ramifications of the world we built and being a part of the futures we would like to see. Anyway, all of that led to relationships with deeper alignment with folks, who we ended up leading this project with. And as this space came available on Washington Street, we made some pretty hard demands [of funders] based on that premise. Like, if it's not gonna be transformative, we didn't want to really be involved. If it's reformative work, there's other people who are willing to do some reformation work. We want something that's transformational. And what's going to be transformational, with development in habitually excluded neighborhoods, would be an opportunity for ownership of the space, in order for us to prioritize legacy residents and small businesses that are intentionally being excluded from economic possibilities, from the marketplace.

We had a lead funder with Boston Medical Center who got it, and a group of folks at Mass Housing Investment Corporation (MHIC) who were willing to shift capital in more equitable ways; they understood it. We got non-extractive money from them, an integrated capital stack made up of a zero-interest

WE WANTED TO PROVIDE FOOD FOR THE COMMUNITY IN A WAY THAT THE COMMUNITY STATED THAT IT WOULD LIKE FOR IT TO RECEIVE FOOD. SO IT'S DIGNIFIED, IT'S PRIDEFUL, IT'S INCLUSIVE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL EFFORTS.

loan and grants; and we worked with the LEAF Fund, the Wagner Foundation, a lot of different folks joined the capital stack in transformative ways to be sure the community was honored. We had some very hard asks in the beginning–and this was during COVID… had it not been for some of the promises that people were making during COVID and some of the realities around social unrest, we might not have been able to make those demands.

There were people inside of these organizations that also really believed that this was a moment to do something different around ownership, around moving capital and trying to prioritize legacy residents to create a market that was not going to just provide access to food, but also create a space of conviviality, a space that engenders dignity, a space that can actually prioritize community wealth building for as many Black and Brown businesses as could get space on our shelves. And so that's how it happened. We wanted to provide food for the community in a way that the community stated that it would like for it to receive food. So it's dignified, it's prideful, it's inclusive of entrepreneurial efforts. And it's open and it's a space that people can be. They're having good conversations. They're meeting with folks, and I hear them dreaming about what's possible.

The key is control: if you have control over markets, you can dictate what you want on your shelf, and you don't have to adhere to the rules that are in place. For instance, if you've got some sauces, or honey, some product: you'd have to go through all of these steps to get on the shelf at a Whole Foods, to scale up. But you probably just need an opportunity, to get some momentum and show that you are connected to a community, that you're at a store. At Nubian Markets, we can provide a local food vendor with that kind of momentum, and we make it very easy to get on the shelf and to get placed well on our shelves.

In our cafe, we'll often highlight different products that are on our shelves in the food we serve; when you book the gathering space, you can order from the cafe, which is buying from local vendors on our shelves like Hapi African Gourmet who we serve chickpea sauce from (a Cameroonian dish made by Paulette) and manufactured in Boston. Elsewhere, a product like Kamal's wonderful Hillside Harvest hot sauce, might get placed two shelves below eyesight.

That's an algorithm: the system wants us to shop a certain way because it prioritizes big food, and there's a whole psychology around putting shelves together, making a planogram. Recently there was an article about how Snoop [Dogg] and Master P put out a cereal brand, and it wasn't on the shelf anywhere. The system bought his stuff. They just wouldn't put it on the shelf. They had control over the market, and they don't want to support just anybody–because if a product starts selling and catches velocity, it might threaten the market's status quo: which of course is attached to big land owners and big corporations and big marketing campaigns that are of course inherently related to the slave trade.

We need to remember, it is the system. I mean, systems are designed to do exactly what they do. So when you talk about a food

system that's not owned by us and is owned by folks who are inherently capitalist and extractive and oppressive, why in the world would they care deeply about community? That's why sovereignty's important, why transformative efforts are important. If you only stay in the space of reformation, you are just reforming a system that was literally built to break Black people, that was built to enslave, built to keep the top 1 to 10% in power. And that's not a conspiracy, <laughs>, that is what capitalism is based upon: scale, buying low and selling high, competitive markets and competitive advantages.

It's a slave economy. And it relies on bots and bullies.

To sustain something so special can be difficult: you have to be more than just a spot, we need to be a space that engenders dignity. And: I love to go to hole-in-the-wall spots, but I think there's a standard we can aspire towards, beyond sticky floors and funky corner stores. So we wanted to create a space that people felt they had to check out.

We have a shared understanding with the Black community here that we all are in this thing trying to fight against gentrification by investing in ourselves and in our communities, and by addressing community needs based upon the leakage that exists. So we can take part in the economic development and the economic movement that is naturally going to happen in a neighborhood like [Nubian] Square, a neighborhood like Roxbury. Nubian Markets is really just proud to be working with other folks on an ecosystem approach where the volatility and risk are shared by a collective of folks who are trying to make Nubian Square what we envision it to be. So we're building up a circular economy where everybody's connected to each other; there's also less than 10 full service grocery stores that are Black-owned in this country, so when you come here you're supporting something special.

I keep bringing up a place like Chris and Kai's Black Market because they deserve their building. If dollars don't go to support institutions like that, that are Black-led that have power and influence, but not capital, then that's a problem. We have to identify and support the critical pieces that create the realities that we talk about all the time–that's kind of what happened with this grocery store. We need to have physical manifestations of what we dream about, whether that's a grocery store, or a jazz club like Jazz Urbane which is coming soon. We need to sustain these things not just with talks, but with capital; and not just with investment capital, but also with our own pockets. It's about preserving the legacy that's here, and also investing in a future that can be shared with legacy residents and other folks.

EGUSI

RECIPE: EGUSI STEW

Ingredients:
2 large plum tomatoes
1 spicy pepper (jalapeño, habanero, scotch bonnet, etc.), stem removed*
16 ounces fresh (or 8 ounces frozen) leafy greens (spinach, kale, collard greens, etc.)
1 medium white or yellow onion
1½ pounds of cubed stew meat (beef, goat, lamb, etc.)
1 teaspoon kosher salt, divided
2 teaspoons HAPI African Gourmet Spice Blend (Aza'a Spice Blend recommended)*
¼ cup oil (palm, safflower, olive, etc.), divided
1½ cups water
28 ounces tomato sauce or purée (no salt added)
3 tablespoons tomato paste
2 pounds fresh shrimp, peeled and deveined
½ cup egusi paste

Instructions:
01. Wash the tomato and spicy peppers. Peel the onion.

02. Wash and chop the fresh greens by first rinsing them under cold water. Let dry or pat dry with a clean towel. When working with kale or collard greens, remove the large stems. Rip or chop the leaves into large 2-inch pieces. Roughly chop the stems into ½-inch pieces and. Put chopped stems and leaves in a bowl and set to the side.

03. Chop the onions and tomatoes into bite-sized (about ½-inch) pieces and put them in separate bowls off to the side. Chop the spicy pepper. To reduce the spiciness of the dish, cut the peppers in half, clean them out, and then chop into pieces. Ensure you wash your hands and clean your cutting board after chopping spicy peppers.

04. Wash and roughly chop the greens, if not pre-chopped. Add to a bowl and set aside.

05. Brown the meat by heating 2 tablespoons of oil in the pot over medium-high heat. Add the cubed stew meat, ½ teaspoon salt, and 2 teaspoons of HAPI African Gourmet Spice Blend. Mix until the seasoning coats the meat, then cook untouched for 6-8 minutes or until browned. Flip the meat and cook for another 4-6 minutes or until the meat is browned on all sides. Remove the meat from the pot, place in a bowl, and set it aside.

06. Prepare to sauté the vegetables by reducing the heat under the pot to medium. Once slightly cooled, add 2 more tablespoons of oil to the pot. Add the chopped peppers, onion, and ¼ teaspoon salt and cook for 2-4 minutes until tender. Add the tomatoes and cook for another 2-4 minutes or until all the vegetables are tender.

07. Optional: To make a creamier dish, blend the sautéed vegetables by first removing the pot from the burner and turning off the heat. Carefully transfer the cooked vegetables to a standard blender and blend until smooth. Return the blended vegetables to the large pot. Alternatively, you can use an immersion blender to blend directly in your pot.

08. Bring the temperature up to medium-high. Add the water, tomato sauce, and tomato paste to the pot and mix until combined. Add the browned meat back into the pot. Cover and cook for 45-50 minutes or until the meat becomes tender and the stew thickens. Stir the pot every 10-15 minutes to prevent burning and promote even cooking.

09. Taste the stew and adjust the salt as needed. If the stew is very thin (i.e., water-like consistency), cook for another 3-5 minutes with the lid off. If the stew is too thick, add water, 1 tablespoon at a time, until it reaches the preferred consistency.

10. Once the meat is tender, stir the stew a few times. Add the shrimp and the remaining ¼ teaspoon of salt. Cook with the lid off for 3-5 minutes or until the shrimp are light pink.

11. Add the leafy greens and egusi paste to the pot and mix until combined. Let cook for 5-10 minutes to let the flavors blend together.

12. Enjoy the dish as is or get creative with your serving. Try fufu, a traditional African staple, or pair it with rice or boiled potatoes. The choice is yours!

STEW

END NOTE
Biplaw Rai

I think the general population really doesn't understand how the restaurant world works. For some, it's a very romantic idea of like, "hey, a café, people are coming together, community, let's eat," you know? There's that fantasy.

The reality is very different; to give an example of, say, avocado toast. I don't know what the price is at the moment, probably between $8 and $12. For that avocado to come to your table, it has traveled thousands of miles and passed lots of hands. And we can start with farming and we can start in Mexico where most of our avocados come from, or from Central America, passing through working class folks' hands. By the time the truck is carrying those avocados across the border to California, they're on track to be shipped to the East coast, and then the purveyors and businesses that sell avocados take it to the restaurant. And then in the restaurant, you have a whole different layer. There are people that are actually processing these avocados, preparing them to go on your plate. Finally, there's the server end of it. I really want our people to think about all of the groups of people that are really involved in this. By the time it really comes to the table, it has changed at least 10 hands and gone through a six to eight month timeframe. So what's the real value of the food on the table? Are we selling the avocado toast for $8, or are we selling it for its real "price"? If we really wanna be a society where we all believe in everyone's prosperity and believe that everyone deserves a living wage, then we gotta start talking about farmers in Mexico.

That also gives you a perspective on how our food prices in restaurants are not real. Restaurants run a profit margin anywhere between five to 10%; really profitable restaurants, 10 and maybe pushing to 15, and those restaurants are usually big chains or have been in the business for a long time. So there's this pull and push effect: consumers always want food cheap. The business also wants a reasonable price, so we don't hurt the guest. But: if we wanna be a business that pays people good, are we saying that the avocado toast should now be $22? Are customers ready to pay that?

When it comes to wages, there's a pretty dark history there. The National Restaurant Association (which might as well be the National Rifle Association, for its politics) is part of why we have a tipped minimum wage ($3.25) in the first place, and why it's lower than the regular minimum wage. When slavery ended and Black folks were emancipated and finding work, the railways decided to capture their labor power as porters and servers on trains, capping their wages to limit how much they could earn. Eventually, the Pullman Porters formed a union to fight this [the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters], but the National Restaurant Association borrowed this strategy and lobbied for the tipped minimum wage. $3.25 in 2025 is nuts.

And there's so much that comes with the tip system: customers feel like they can harass restaurant workers, because they feel like they have a grip on workers' lives: "I'm tipping you, you are working for me." The tip system, in my opinion, should just be abolished; and customers need to

IT'S WORKING-CLASS PEOPLE, BLACK AND BROWN IMMIGRANTS, UNDER THE HOOD THAT MAKE EVERYTHING YOU EAT. BE APPRECIATIVE OF IT, RIGHT? IN THE MEANTIME: TIP YOUR SERVERS WELL.

be educated and readied for this kind of change, for higher prices.

My hope really is for customers to start asking themselves questions. You demand that you get it cheap. You also demand that people are getting paid well. That's impossible.

Sometimes we encounter this dilemma where we are in Upham's Corner: are we able to offer prices such that average people in the neighborhood can come? And this is very difficult. When we first opened, our café service was actually for that, so people could afford to come all day and hang out; even if they didn't buy anything, they could hang out. And our dinner was then an elevated experience. We shut down the café, because even that was not sustainable.

I'll put it back to the community: we want restaurants and businesses that are affordable, while also living up to our standards. But we also need to be invested in supporting these businesses. A prime example is Dorchester Food Co-Op. It took ten years for that to come out of the ground, with a lot of people behind it–I was involved in the process in the beginning. But we need people to keep coming. I could name tons of businesses in Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan that are owned by local people of color with good food and good service, but… people will go to the South End and have a good time and pay their prices, but then there's a different narrative, a different set of rules for our businesses. One of our very first nasty public comments on Google was a reviewer saying, "oh, you know, I don't know about this restaurant. It's too clean for Dorchester."

We all have unique things to offer. We all don't have to be the same. That's what a neighborhood is. If you have 10 Comfort Kitchens in Dorchester, it makes no sense. You know, we need Fresh Food Generation, we need Nubian Markets, and everyone else, too.

Here at Comfort Kitchen, we try to have a balance; we try to pay people well, and everyone gets two days off. Nobody's working more than eight hours.

It's working-class people, Black and brown immigrants, under the hood that make everything you eat. Like if you're coming to a restaurant and you are trying to complain about price, maybe you should do some research on the place. Our staff puts in a considerable amount of labor hours to do what they need to do. Be appreciative of it, right? In the meantime: tip your servers well.

PLENTY

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