

Possible titles:

Cooking Without Care

This Is Not Your Mother's Cookbook

When Worse Comes To Worse: What To Do When You're Forced To Cook

Good Food, Bad Choices

For Those About To Cook

Subtitle: The Art of Molecular Manipulation

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Introduction

You may wonder why me, of all people, would write a cookbook. Well, I'll tell ya'll. It's because I know that there are plenty of people like me who want to have a cookbook in their home but have no idea how much a 'dash' is. The only thing I've ever measured is a shot of scotch and the only time I use more than three items to eat a meal is when something caught on fire.

I searched high and low (well, mainly in bookstores) for a cookbook that gave me the information I needed. Information like: What is a good food? Where did utensils come from? What are those squiggly little marks over the letters in French foods?

Let's start with the last one because it's a pet peeve of mine. Under no circumstances will I use those little marks. Under no circumstances will I confuse you by making anything French (except French fries and they were invented in England. That's one of the main reasons why there will be no French food mentioned in this book. They took the only good food to come out of England and put their name on it. Another reason is that I feel that kitchen is a French word meaning 'passage way to the back yard' so I'm blaming all kitchen related activities on the French. It seems only fair). Besides no French foods, I will not even mention anything French and that includes: saute, flambe, quiche, Jacques, those useless little berets, escargot, and I'm going so far as to put a moratorium on Jerry Lewis because if it wasn't for the French his career would be over and we'd all be safe on Labor Day. And, if you respect me at all, please do not have deja vu while reading this book.

No, I'm going to give you the information that you really need. Who, in their right mind, needs to know how to cook a duck for thirty highbrow art critics? Pretentious people, that's who. People who know what to do with the little fork with three tines (see, you're learning something already-

tines are those sharp, pointy things at the end of forks). But definitely not normal people like us. People who know that the best meal is one that's connected to someone else's credit card.

I've also made sure that I have scrupulously followed certain guidelines: 1) It takes less time to make than a commercial break and 2) It doesn't use utensils that look as though they could be part of a make-up kit.

Although I have to use the word 'cooking' I don't like it. Too many bad experiences. I like to think that I'm sharing with you the Art of Molecular Manipulation. I like that name because it sounds very scientific and I am trying to get a government grant for further research. But also because that's what I'm doing. I'm taking a substance (in this experiment: water) from its natural habitat (the kitchen sink) and manipulating its molecular structure (by making it boil) to make an entirely new substance (in this experiment: coffee). I bet you didn't know that you do a science experiment every morning before you even wake up, did you?

That's my goal. To make you more confident in the kitchen. To make you feel like a real chef even though the only time you've ever used a spatula was to smoosh a bug. To make you one with the kitchen and its environs. But mainly I did this to put a few more dollars into my checking account.

Chapter 1

How To Pick A Fire Extinguisher

You may be wondering why I'd start a cookbook with a chapter on fire extinguishers. Well, let's just say that the grant from the National Association of Fire Extinguisher Manufacturers had no bearing on our decision.

No, it's because I truly feel that a fire extinguisher should be the centerpiece of your kitchen tool box. And it's not just because of the obvious reasons: they make great door stops, they scare cats (always an added bonus) and, if you get a big one, it makes a great extra seat. No, those are just good side effects. The real reason for getting a great, all-purpose fire extinguisher is so you can save face.

Think about it. You can't cook to save your life (and if you can but purchased this book so you can write us letters correcting our culinary errors ("You never broil a gophers spleen! To bring out the natural flavor of this underrated culinary delight, you. . ." - don't be such a chum brain. Like most people with busy and productive lives (i.e. I have cable), I want my food fast and, if possible, digestible. When the bell rings, I eat. End of discussion). And because you can't cook, once in a great while (OK, once when you were drunk) you felt bad because you never have your friends, family and loves over to enjoy a special meal prepared in your own little kitchen by your own little hands.

So, just before you sobered up, you invited everyone over and planned a wonderful meal. But when the big day arrived you acted just like your big, goofy self and messed up. The fresh garden peas ended up in the toilet, the ice cream was soup and the main course which looked so good in the picture-resembled the hard copy of a tequila and peppermint schnapps bender.

You needed to do something fast. You checked your cabinets and found, not to your surprise, some long forgotten cheese snacks and a box of something that came with the place. After running around frantically trying to find someone who just happened to have a meal for six hanging around you gave up. You knew it was hopeless so you did what comes naturally sat in front of the TV watching videos.

That was before you purchased this book. I can save your life and make people feel sorry for you the next time you get too drunk to keep your mouth shut. And all it takes is a simple fire extinguisher.

In reality, a fire extinguisher is used to put out fires. But using my fool-proof plan, you will be a hero and never have done a bit of work. Go ahead, be Chef Delight, invite everyone over, forget about all of your past failures. Sit back and let me tell you how to get a free meal from everyone you invite to your big dinner.

I don't want you to think that you don't have to do anything, you have to get some type of food. Just take whatever is left over in the refrigerator and toss it into a big dish (to be on the safe side you should use one that you can't see through-don't want to blow it by having a guest see a beer cap next to a piece of macaroni). Ten minutes before your guests arrive put the 'dinner' into the sink and spray every inch of it with the fire extinguisher. Cover it fully so they can't recognize that it could have been food in a past incarnation. To make the scene even more realistic get a little on your shirt-just enough for them to think that you risked your life to make them a meal.

When they come to the door make sure that you have your best, "You should have been here 10 minutes ago. I almost lost everything when my succulent roast, that I've slaved over since last night, went up in a ball of flame. I think that there is something wrong with my oven. I'm going to have to call my landlord in the morning."

It's at this moment when you look at them with a concerned expression, pretend that your favorite ballplayer just had a groin injury, and say, "I'm so sorry to have invited you here and have no food. I wish I could afford to take you out instead (turn your gaze towards the sink), but I spent all my money on your dinner (gesture dejectedly)." If you play your cards right you may never have to buy a dinner again.

But I know what you're saying, 'Hey, that's a great plan but what is the best fire extinguisher to use to fool my friends and loved ones?' Obviously a plain water fire extinguisher is useless for our purposes. It's not all that impressive to see a bowl full of water with some croutons floating in it.

Remember, you're going after maximum pity and if you spray yourself with a water fire extinguisher it'll look like you just got out of the shower and forgot to make anything. Zero on the pity meter.

You want a fire extinguisher with, what is called in the industry, coverage. Make sure that you get one that uses that foamy white stuff. You start spraying it around the kitchen and people can see that you, with your quick thinking and fast action, averted a major catastrophe. Or you tried to clean the oven and it just got out of control.

When you visit your local fire extinguisher store (all the better neighborhoods have them so you may have to travel quite a distance) make sure that you ask for it by name. In the industry it's called: 'the fire extinguisher with the foamy white stuff.' Accept no substitutes. Once you get it start spraying instead of cooking you'll start to pile up those frequent diner pounds.

*****Information on types of fire extinguishers with graphics of same*****

Chapter 2

Utensils Hand Tools

A chapter on the utensils would not be complete without a stroll through the evolution of hand tools. We know that most of you take forks and spoons and those little drink umbrellas for granted. But there was a time when there were no utensils (ask your parents, we bet they'll have plenty of stories about how difficult eating was before the invention of teeth). People felt fortunate to put something in their mouth that wasn't biting back. It was a primitive time. People actually ate dinner with their family.

Evolution of Hand Tools

Graphic: Tongue-Hand-Rock-Stick-Knife-Fork-Spoon

Ancient man, in an attempt not to starve to death, began the practice of licking things for nourishment. Some things, like ice cream, were perfect for this form of dining. But others, like dirt and members of the mastodon family, rendered this form of utensil useless and fairly dangerous. One day Uggh, the unrecognized father of the utensil, crept up on a sleeping ferret and began licking. It was a tasty meal until the ferret woke up and scurried away. Uggh, with the entire tribe watching, knew that he couldn't let this meal pass so he reached out and snagged the surprised ferret with his hands and popped the wiggling morsel into his mouth. The tribe was shocked and, truthfully, felt a little stupid.

*****Graphic of Uggh*****

"I told you it would be easier to eat with these hanging things." Uggh's wife called out as he rested on a boulder to finish his meal. "And get your bendy things off the table." And that's how in one day both eating with your hands and manners were created.

Unfortunately, eating with your hands didn't remain the foremost utensil for long. Well, that's if we exclude fraternities, sporting events and barbecues. People soon found that if you tried to catch certain animals with their hands it would at best hurt a lot and most likely cause major pieces of them to be really late for dinner (note: vegetarians hadn't been invented yet and wouldn't until Cambridge, Massachusetts was founded much, much later).

Uggh, seeing the limits to his new invention, and not being a man known to sit on his laurels (for obvious reasons) went to work correcting this problem. Again, Uggh's wife (who was never

named in history but we have information that leads us to believe that her name was Yolanda) was there to help guide Uggh's particular genius.

It seems that Uggh was out with the boys, getting into a few berries and mushrooms, and he didn't come home for three big, bright thing in the sky's. Yolanda, a woman who didn't quite understand this caveman bonding ritual, went looking for her man. When she found him, his elbows on a boulder and everything, she became incensed. Looking around she found a rock and tossed it at Uggh.

Uggh, thinking as quickly as he could with a big lump on the back of his head, picked up the rock and threw it. Of course, he wasn't throwing it at his wife, he was throwing it at the large, purple grasshopper flying towards him. The grasshopper, which Yolanda never did see, was surrounded by all the men and Uggh was once again praised for his efforts in utensil progress. What this proved to Uggh is that he should pay more attention to the efforts of his wife because she helped him realize that behind every successful guy is a really big lump.

*****Graphic of Yolanda*****

Uggh continued to spread the gospel of the utensil throughout other tribes. His demonstrations would bring in crowds from miles around. They would sit in rapt attention as Uggh would explain the wonders of his new inventions. Although Uggh didn't know it his meetings were the first infomercials.

His next invention was also his most controversial. One side says that Uggh, tired of burning his fingers while trying to cook his continent famous lizard gizzard, found a long, thin stick and stuck it through the lizard creating another utensil.

But, as with most great inventors, Uggh had his detractors. It seems that this group of rabble rousers, led by Bill Bailey, who invented the first street map to help him find his way home, felt that Uggh stole the idea for the stick from a boy named Sue.

Their version is that after a matinee performance Uggh was schmoozing with sales reps in the VIP (Very Important Primate) lounge and saw Sue jabbing at a sleeping saber tooth tiger with a stick and stole the idea. The detractors say that Sue's unfortunate demise (by the very same rather agitated saber tooth tiger) made it easy for Uggh to claim the invention as his own.

The authors of this book, after countless hours of scholarly research, have come to the conclusion that it really doesn't matter who invented the stick. They're both dead and the only thing we eat off of sticks now is burnt marshmallows. But, unfortunately for humanity, whether he was the true inventor or not, the stick was the final utensil that Uggh ever completed.

For the remainder of his life (which considering the life span of a caveman was probably 10 days) Uggh was consumed with one invention, the electric blender. He wanted to be able to make health drinks for thin, pale cavepeople who were opening up pits that catered to the health conscious person. In the end it was both a health and business failure. Your basic cavedweller figured they were only going to live for a few years anyway, why not tear off the limb of the closest beast and live life to the fullest. It wasn't until a microbus full of people took a wrong turn

on the way to Woodstock in 1969 and ended up in Berkeley, California that health food restaurants began it's resurgence.

The blender became such an obsession to Uggh that he was finally committed to Happy Cavern, the first mental institution. It's not that Uggh's invention wasn't brilliant, it's just that there was one tragic flaw: large municipal companies hadn't figured out a way to charge for electricity yet. And because of that oversight, Uggh has become a footnote in the history of the utensil. After that initial burst of utensil activity it was quite some time before the next surge of inventions. As civilization progressed some people began to get aggravated with having to gnaw their food into bite-sized chunks. After a victorious duel, Sir Hortance Constance Reginald Dwight Smythe the III, Lord Over You, Prince of a Guy, House of the Two-Door Garage, Ruler of the Inch, in a showy move that befit his name, whooshed his sword through the air and neatly sliced a piece of meat into a bite sized chunk.

The entire gathering rejoiced and began pulling out swords and slashing wildly. The merriment at the new discovery quickly went awry when one of Sir Smythe's knights, Nigel Weathervane, had pieces of his fingers chopped off. Sir Smythe, who recognized the figure crawling around the floor trying to differentiate between meat chunks and finger pieces as one of his top swordsmen and rushed over to see what could be done. He took Nigel's hands into his own and in his lofty style said,

"Get this bloody retch out of my castle."

And with that Nigel was tossed into the moat by members of the Rent-A-Palace-Guard company. The moment Nigel hit the cold and icky water two things happened. Nigel was sure that he would catch pneumonia and English people started using the word 'bloody' as an adjective.

Once Nigel (or as he was known from then on: Knuckles) got home he began to think about his life after swordsmanship. He was trained from a young child to be a master swordsman and he had no other marketable skill. And now he was on the street. Although he tried to continue his career the lack of major portions of fingers made it difficult to grasp a sword. He experimented with different grips and racket head sizes but it was to no avail. Nigel was at the lowest point of his life.

One night during dinner Nigel's wife, Belinda, tried to use a sword to cut Nigel's food for him. He watched in horror as her dainty hands swung the sword in the general direction of the meat. Nigel, once he felt safe to get up from under the table, knew that he had to come up with something if he wanted to keep his few remaining stubs. That night while sitting in his favorite chair, the cable remote placed in his lap (channel surfing was the last family job that he held firmly), a brilliant idea hit him while watching reruns of The George Burns Show. He quickly ran to his workroom. After waking his kids and getting them off of the workbench, he began to craft a small, fairly harmless version of a sword.

*****Graphic of Nigel*****

The next morning he awoke Belinda at first light with his new invention and she quickly and effortlessly put it to use tightening screws around the house. When Nigel explained what his invention was truly for Belinda felt a little foolish (who in their right mind would use this tool as a screwdriver?). So for the first time ever at the Weathervane household a meal was completed without a major injury or death (the Heimlich Maneuver, which was invented by 'Potsie' of 'Happy Days' fame, hadn't been invented yet).

Nigel, a man of quick action, was hot to capitalize on his invention which he named a 'wife's knight' because 'it can be there when your husband's away killing and maiming the hordes and you get really hungry' (that was also the first advertising slogan). He quickly rushed down to the patent office where he stood in line for a week. This was way before telephones so instead of being aggravated by being placed on permahold you had to go down to the office in person to stand in line with a bucket on your head. We feel the old days were more humane. By the time Nigel got to the head of the line he had become close friends with a man who had invented a thing that's placed on your roof and it would point the direction from which the wind was blowing. The man liked Nigel so much that he decided to name his invention after him. Nigel wanted to return the favor, but he thought that Cuisenart was a stupid name for a product.

By the time Cuisenart left with his weathervane Nigel was ready to present his invention. But the only clerk on duty was one with an irrational fear of the letters W, G, H and T so he renamed the wife's knight accordingly. A little hurt at this bureaucratic meddling in the private sector Nigel continued to persevere with his newly named 'knife.'

Not a man to sit on his laurels (for the same reasons as his utensil predecessor, Uggh) Nigel began to see the limits of the knife. Sure, it's great for cutting things with limited damage to the hungry throng, but you have to take into consideration the mental powers of people from this era. When the job of letting passing knights and lords chop off hanging limbs was considered a prestige position, we think you can see that the high IQ group, MENSA, didn't make too many membership drives in this vicinity. People were using the knife to eat everything from Wolverine Spleen to Angel Hair Pasta (fortunately two dishes that are seldom seen these days outside of establishments that use the word 'bistro' proudly).

No matter how many hours Nigel spent teaching proper knife etiquette, the masses were content to jam the knife down their throats to make sure they get the last morsel of weasel. It seemed that Nigel's invention was destined for failure until one day he was sitting on a bale of hay contemplating the rest of his life as a broke, fingerless man. The only job he could think of was as the guy who pushes cotton into aspirin bottles.

He glumly watched the farmer toss mounds of hay effortlessly around his property until he realized that it would be neater if he would put the hay in piles. The farmer, now a little irritated, noticed that Nigel was jumping around making the farm an even bigger mess. The farmer thought Nigel was making fun of him, not that he had just come up with another invention that would change mankind. The farmer then chased Nigel through the field with the pitch fork until he forced Nigel into a nearby leech infested creek. The farmer, all a flutter with successful vengeance, went back to work as did Nigel. Well, after his wife spent most of the evening picking leeches from his flesh.

His new invention, the fork, was a unparalleled success. Nigel quickly became one of the richest men in the land. But all was not perfect in the utensil universe. No matter what Nigel did to make life easier on his fellow man it wasn't enough. They were gnawing huge chunks of raw meat, he created a knife. They were giving themselves tonsillectomies over dinner, he invented a fork. But now people from all walks of life were coming into Nigel's shop with problems they felt it was his duty to solve.

"I'm just a utensil inventor, dammit!" He exclaimed after an unanswerable question about the inability of the Boston Red Sox to win a World Series in over 75 years.

This pressure to create started to take its toll on Nigel. The one complaint he knew he should be able to fix, a way to eat soup without spilling it all over you, was eating away at him. He started to spend all his time in his workshop trying to make food a less hazardous and more enjoyable dining experience.

*****Graphic of Belinda*****

His experiments started to become more and more bizarre. Although some of these failures did become utensils when The Institute for Useless Kitchen Items stumbled on his barely legible notes in the junk drawer of Belinda's kitchen. We feel that the Institute must have misread some of his notes. How else can you explain egg separators?

Nigel seemed to be going slowly crazy in the high pressure world of utensil invention (as evidenced by his ability to understand the lyrics of Neil Young) but he completed his final utensil with a flourish. During his afternoon aimless wandering, Nigel stopped by a well for a spot of water. The bucket was stuck on a jagged piece of rock so Nigel reached down to pry it loose. With one strenuous yank, he flipped over like a cheese omelet, his head jammed inside the bucket and he plummeted blindly towards the water.

While treading water, waiting for someone to get thirsty and find him, Nigel had a vision that proved to be the final piece to compete the Holy Trinity of Utensils. He noticed that the bucket held water and made it easy to drink from. He figured that if he made a knife wider, blunter and slightly concave it too could hold liquid. As the idea crystallized in his head Nigel felt weightless. It wasn't until he was halfway up the well before he realized the weightlessness came from being hoisted out of the well by some workmen.

None of this mattered to Nigel as he raced towards his workshop to pound away all night until he came up with the prototype of the first spoon. He presented it to his family during their traditional breakfast of boar snout and Froot Loops. His family was slightly weary of waking up to Nigel's inventions.

It was only a few short weeks earlier that Nigel, eager to branch out into the lucrative toy market, disappointed his family with the 'Oy-Oy.' No one knew quite what to do with a toy that you drop and watch as it rolled under the entertainment center. It wasn't until after string was invented that a guy named Duncan tied up the primitive 'Oy-Oy', changed its name to 'Yo-Yo' and made gazillions of dollars selling what has to be the most boring toy ever invented (I only say this

because I could never do any of those fancy tricks. The only one I could do was 'Dragging the Dead Dog').

But all that was forgotten as the spoon became a raging success. People began to order the entire knife, fork, spoon set in unprecedented numbers. Nigel, who by this time was beginning to tire of all this manual labor, wanted to pass his craft down to his children. Only one thing stood in his way: his kids were too busy traveling the world 'finding themselves' to have any interest in the family business.

In a fit one afternoon (many believed it was caused because his favorite soap opera was preempted by the Queen's 'State of My Wardrobe' address) Nigel sold everything he owned and moved to California where he started a series of seminars targeted towards the 'get rich without working' crowd. But Nigel quickly became bored with fleecing the lazy and addle minded so he spent the rest of his life creating the one item that was just for himself. Fingerless gloves.

And that's the history of hand tools as I made it up. You may be saying, 'Hey, what does that have to do with our modern life?' and that's a good question. Not one that we can answer, but it's a good question. No seriously, I wanted to accomplish two things with that little tour down Utensil Lane: 1) I wanted you see the evolution of hand tools from the simple human hand to instruments so specialized that you need a degree from MIT to identify (who needs a garlic mincer? Wouldn't two spoons or a ball-peen hammer achieve the same effect?) and 2) I needed to fill 10 pages or so.

My research into hand tools has proven one thing: We're all being snookered by utensil manufacturers. Knife, fork, spoon, maybe an ice cream scoop.

That's about it. Oh, I can hear some of you out there,

"You know, I make a really superb meatball and I couldn't survive without my bite size meatball maker. And if I didn't have my lobster picks, well . . ."

OK, OK, settle down. Don't make me come over there. Here's what I have to say in regards to that: close this book right now. Get away from me. You make me sick. You've actually used a cookbook, haven't you? Boy, are you weird. Now go. Just go fondle your pepper mill, will ya? Geez, some people.

Well, sorry to interrupt but you can't let those melon baller type people get a toe hold on normal society. They fall into the trap utensil manufacturers have set and the next thing you know you're nodding in agreement with them. The next day you have an uncontrollable desire to own your very own tea ball. It's a disease and I'm out here to make sure you don't catch it.

- - - Other things I want to include - - -

| Good Food | Bad Food |
|--|---|
| Anything with ice cream | Anything with sprouts |
| Rich and creamy | Creepy and crawly |
| A pleasant aroma | A rancid stench |
| You savor it | You run over it |
| Anything delivered to the comfort of your home | Anything that resembles your grandmother's neck |
| Light and fluffy | Moving and fuzzy |

For Glossary

Dash: What you do to the store when you see this in a recipe.

Picking cereal by it's name used to be easy. Wheaties has wheat in it. Corn Flakes has tasty flakes of corn. Cracklin' Oat Bran has more than the minimum daily requirement for you to spend your day in regularity splendor. Nowadays we get little help. For example, we know that Sugar Smacks has sugar in it but, if we believe what we read, it also has smack in it. We also know that there are oats in it, but are there real Quakers in Quaker Oats? What about Lucky Charms? Pieces of criminals with bad nicknames and good etiquette? What exactly is a 'froot' and why do I want it as part of this well balanced breakfast?