

Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

REFLECTIONS ON NORTH CAMPUS—PART II

JOSEPH LUNA

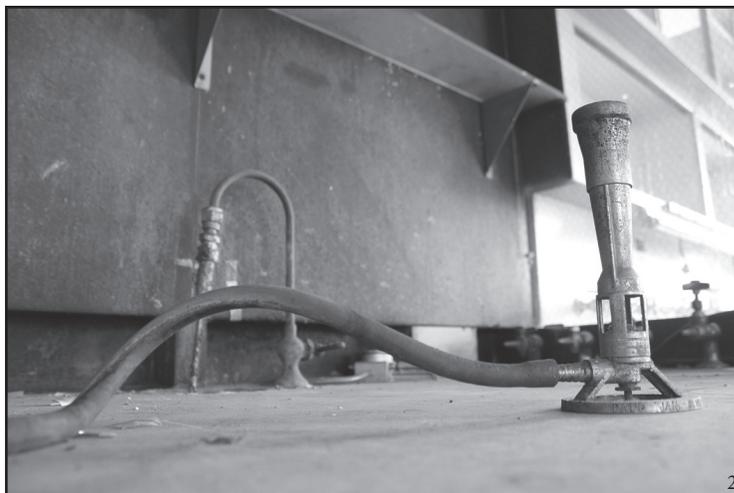
“With enough money, you can buy a new building with new instruments and hire brilliant people to do research. What you can’t buy is heritage.” I’m sitting with Dr. Alex Tomasz, head of the Laboratory of Microbiology and Infectious Diseases, who recently moved his lab from the first floor of Flexner Hall to the fifth floor of the Bronk building. Both spaces are certainly not without a bit of heritage. The Tomasz lab occupied a space previously used by Edward Tatum (1958 Nobel for “one gene, one enzyme”) and before him Fritz Lipmann (1953 Nobel for the discovery of Co-enzyme A). You’ve probably seen their signs outside the 66th Street gate. Dr. Tomasz’s current space in Bronk is no different and has the added bonus of holding some personal significance: the fifth floor was where George Palade’s lab was located, and it is where Palade himself taught Tomasz how to use an electron microscope over four decades ago. Or, as Tomasz tells it: “by this point, Palade practically had the Nobel in his pocket. But he remained so patient, involved and generous, even with a young postdoc.”

We’ve gotten wondrously side-tracked but Tomasz continues, “to get to your question: how do we move forward, renovating lab spaces for a new generation while still remembering those that came before? There are no easy solutions.”

It’s a common enough trope in this city. An aging building stands in the way of modern “progress,” while the simultaneous urge for preservation galvanizes certain people to fight against the oncoming sledgehammers. There are victories (the cancellation of the Lower Manhattan Expressway for instance), and there are defeats (the original Penn Station); and it’s usually up to history to decide which victories were worthwhile and which losses lamentable. What makes the Flexner and Smith renovations notable is that the university compromised to keep the exterior of the buildings intact, opting instead to comprehensively remodel their interiors. In a neighborhood where laboratory construction points skyward, this was a bold move. Flexner and Smith are both dwarfed by the

current construction efforts across the street at Cornell and Sloane-Kettering; they could just as easily have been demolished in favor of taller buildings with more abundant lab space. But they weren’t. Moreover, as Dr. Miklós Müller pointed out to me, they remain among the few scientific buildings in the neighborhood still named after scientists. “That certainly makes them special,” Müller says.

Dr. Müller, who retired as head of the Laboratory of Biochemical Parasitology in 2005, recently moved his office from the sixth floor of Flexner back to his previous home on the fourth floor of Founder’s Hall. “Change is inevitable,” says Müller, who concedes the loss of historic lab spaces on campus, having witnessed firsthand the gradual conversion of Founder’s Hall over many years from laboratory to administrative space. Nevertheless, both Tomasz and Müller can agree that Flexner (and Smith before it) were in need of comprehensive repair. Leaks were an issue: “when it rained, I would occasionally use an umbrella in my office,” says Tomasz. Thankfully, Plant Operations solved problems as they arose. Yet despite the problems, and the prospect of future cutting-edge facilities, one gets the sense from these senior professors of the history whitewashed by renovation: the sort of stories that can only be told upon entering a room and saying, “this happened here.”



This is not to say that efforts to preserve RU history are absent. Despite the loss of historic spaces, there are many on campus to acknowledge who are at work preserving the artifacts and stories surrounding the university’s greatest achievements. A number of senior research and emeritus faculty, as well as library staff, continue to work on various histories of the university. Meanwhile, the RU Hospital Centennial celebrations have not been without fitting historical tributes, complete with a recent portraits lecture and an ongoing exhibit in the library (itself a host for previous installations on the Transforming Principle and the life of RU microbiologist and environmentalist René Dubos). Add the historical instrument collection, formerly housed in the preserved laboratory of Lyman Craig on the sixth floor

of Flexner but temporarily in storage, and one gets a fuller picture of the ongoing work to document the history of RU, even if the locations on campus where such history occurred have been renovated into mere memory.

Such memories however, feel rooted in physical space, inasmuch as their locations were the backdrop for discoveries, failures and endless anecdotes for generations of scientists. This remains elusive in renovated halls, and is certainly lost on today's student and postdoc. But does it matter? We can read, for instance, of Peyton Rous' 1911 discovery of a cancer-causing virus that earned him a Nobel prize in 1966; we can even read his papers and piece together the story that fundamentally re-shaped our understanding of cancer. Does it add anything to know where he kept his office or where his lab was? Let's find out.

Next month, we'll finish this series with past and current residents of Smith Hall and their take on the renovation. And we'll begin in Rous' old space. A hint: it was somewhere in Smith.

Special thanks to Drs. Miklós Müller and Alexander Tomasz for their time and comments, most of all their stories. ☺

Credits: (1) Wooden microscope boxes outside the Auerbach lab, 1st floor, Flexner Hall. Photograph by the author.

(2) Tomasz lab, 1st Floor, Flexner Hall. Photograph by Kristen D. Windmuller.

Career Planning for Scientists According to Monica Kerr

JEANNE GARBARINO

On October 13, the RU Biotech Forum hosted Monica Kerr, director of the Science Alliance at the New York Academy of Sciences (NYAS). For those of you who are unfamiliar with the Science Alliance, or the NYAS, or both, this should change. The NYAS is a non-profit scientific organization with a multi-purpose mission. This organization, located at 7 World Trade Center in lower Manhattan, is approaching its 200th anniversary and is still going strong. The NYAS aims to mobilize science to aid in global challenges, promote scientific literacy, serve as a means for scientific publication, and advance valid scientific policy. In addition, there are several community service-based programs sponsored by NYAS, including Scientists Without Borders, K-12 Outreach, Science and The City, and the topic of this article, the Science Alliance. The major focus of the Science Alliance is to fill in the gaps between universities, teaching hospitals, independent research facilities, industry, and non-profit organizations, all in the name of advancing the careers of students and postdocs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Given Monica Kerr's passion for science education and career planning, this was a match made in heaven.

Monica began the talk by discussing statistics regarding the jobs held by those with a Ph.D. in science, math, or engineering. Presently, there are 40,000 science and science-related Ph.Ds awarded on an annual basis in the USA, and there are approximately 55,000 postdocs. Of these, only 20% go on to pursue a tenure-track faculty position. Surprisingly, the remaining scientists do not all go into industry; only 28% enter the for-profit realm (i.e. pharmaceutical or biotech). The rest are distributed among the self-employed, non-profit organizations, and non-research-based

education. Given that the audience was mostly made up of career-hungry students and postdocs, Monica went on to focus on the strategies for landing a job.

It seems that many of us emerge from our Ph.D. programs wholly unprepared to enter the job market. Sure, we take a year or two of course work, are trained in ethical scientific conduct, and take a qualifying exam at some point during the process, but there are many skills that are not addressed during our formal scientific training. For instance, even though many of us are pursuing an academic position, we have received virtually no guidance with respect to learning the responsibilities associated with a faculty position (like lab management, teaching and mentoring, and grant writing). The situation doesn't get better for those who decide to do a postdoc as, more often than not, there is very little oversight for postdocs. Monica pointed out that it is important to be proactive—prepare yourself and don't wait for the opportunity to fall onto your lap. Although she cited a situation where formal postdoctoral training and oversight were directly correlated with happiness in the postdoc position, the reality is that most of us are on our own. But that doesn't mean you can't take responsibility and prepare yourself.

When thinking about which career path you should walk, it is important to undergo a self-assessment. You can make use of professionally developed algorithms, such as the Myers-Briggs Indicator and Strong Interest Inventory test, to get a sense of where you belong. Or, self-guided exercises can be employed. Ultimately, the goal is to identify where your interests, skills, and values intersect. Monica continued by asking the audience the question: "As a scientist, what are some

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of your transferrable skills?" The ice was broken when "not pipetting" was yelled out. This was followed by things like problem-solving, critical thinking, public speaking, and interacting on a professional level. Basically, she recommends that you list your top ten qualities, being sure to provide specific examples of these characteristics at work in your life. Another step to self-realization is to list at least 5 to 7 examples in which you were successful. This does not have to be related in any way to lab work. For instance, I provided an example of how I organized and participated in an Iron Chef competition during college. This, along with several other situations, led me to identify a pattern—I tend to take on "leadership" type roles, often organizing social and/or academic events (such as this specific talk). Ah, one step closer to finding my dream job, right? Well, in fact, yes! This was a major step in discovering what I want to be when I grow up. The next step is to assess your interests. To do this, it might be necessary to move away from your molecule/pathway/favorite disease and uncover what it is that you truly like doing. Lastly, there are values. What are your must-haves or deal-breakers? This can often involve things like the work setting, the work content, and/or work relationships.

If you are or will be on the job market at any time in the near future, here are a few resources: *Alternative Careers in Science* by Cynthia Robbins-Roth; *Outside the Ivory Tower: A guide for academics considering alternative careers* by Margaret Newhouse; The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Test, www.myersbriggs.org; Stanford University's Career Development Center Guided Career Path Tool, <http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/cdc/identify/self-assessments>.

Best of luck! ☺

PDA News

ISABEL KURTH

After a summer break, we are back with some news from the PDA front! The biggest event that we had this summer was our annual PDA retreat on August 4 and 5. This year we went to the peaceful and quiet Skytop lodge, a golf resort in the middle of the Pocono Mountains in the heart of Pennsylvania. Just a 2.5-hour drive outside of the city—it seemed another world. No stinky cars, no rushing people, no city noise. The perfect setting for a getaway to talk science, hang out, and have fun.

This year we had more than 80 participating postdocs and two guest speakers, Nobel laureate Dr. Richard Axel from Columbia University and Dr. Fred Cross from RU. 13 postdocs made the effort of presenting their work in a 25-minute talk. We had a great mix of people from different research areas and labs. We heard about how axons from excitatory and inhibitory neurons behave after plucking whiskers (Sally Marik, Gilbert lab); how mutations in a set of viral transmembrane proteins affect viral replication and viral assembly (Ramnath, Rice lab); why we (or in this case, mice) like sugar more than artificial sweeteners (Ana Domingos, Friedman lab); how the lagging strand DNA polymerase knows when to fall off the template and how this is triggered (Isabel Kurth, O'Donnell lab). We also learned how general arousal correlates with the electrophysiological, anatomical and protein expression properties of neurons in the mGi (Eugene Martin, Pfaff lab); how modulating the synaptic transmission of ABCG1 neurons makes *Drosophila* copulate for hours without getting tired (Michael Crickmoore, Fuchs lab); that hair follicle stem cells undergo intrinsic reprogramming once they exit their niche and become part of the hair germ (Ting Chen, Fuchs lab); how heroin-dependent rats behave much like humans when they are in acute withdrawal: every rat very differently (Katharine Seip, Kreek lab); how volunteers that received sound stimuli behave differently depending

on the relative levels of dopamine to dopamine-degrading enzyme COMT (Manuel Garcia-Garcia, Freiwald lab); how Nucleobinding 1 (NUCB1) prevents amyloid fibril formation, which has been implicated in 25 different human diseases (Ruchi Gupta, Sakmar lab); that the Hid protein successfully translocates the inhibitor of apoptosis proteins (IAPs)—which are upregulated in a number of cancers—to the mitochondria, where they are efficiently degraded (Anshuman Kelkar, Stellar lab); how one can transduce surface epithelium of mouse embryos by infecting with fluorescently-traceable lentiviruses carrying RNAi or Cre-recombinase and how this technology can be used to study the role of tumor suppressor α -catenin and the function of Ctnna1, Hras1-Mapk3 and Trp53 pathways in regulating skin proliferation and apoptosis (Beronja Slobodan, Fuchs lab); or what factors affect spindle orientation by promoting asymmetric cell divisions (Williams Scott, Fuchs lab).

The talks were distributed in five sessions over two days with sufficient time in between to discuss the results and exchange ideas, while nibbling on the yummy cookies and sipping coffee or tea. A highlight of the retreat was Richard Axel's keynote address during which he gave a mesmerizing talk on the logic of olfactory coding from the nose all the way into the piriform cortex. It was inspiring to hear and see how a scientist can constantly evolve in new directions and keep innovative research going. His calm, witty and very thoughtful presence was a very enriching experience for everybody. We then engaged the two faculty members in a panel discussion on a variety of topics, including how they got to where they are, what inspired them along the way and where they think science will evolve. Who had ever thought that Fred Cross would get into what he did by random choices rather than a specific determination for what he wanted to do? One recurring comment that both Richard and Fred made was to encourage all of us to share data, to talk about what we are doing and to not be afraid of someone stealing ideas. It has worked out pretty well for them and it makes us have faith in creating and keeping a collaborative and open scientific environment.



Photographs by Spyridon Mylonas

The first day ended with a party with music and great food. The free drinks made sure that everybody was happy with his or her evening. And as the night progressed, some even got courageous enough to shake some butts on the dance floor.

The second day was filled with talks, and some free time in the afternoon for hikes, canoeing, archery, minigolf, volleyball—or just doing nothing and chilling at the pool or lying in the grass. The weather was sunny and hot, the perfect day for some outdoor activities. After the last BBQ, we packed up in the evening and hopped back onto the bus to return to the busy city. Overall, the retreat turned out to be a very fun, pleasant and interactive event, where one finally got to know some of the faces that appear around campus.

This past month, back from the refreshing retreat, the PDA has been dealing with some issues regarding the CFC. We performed a survey to get an understanding of the most urgent problems that people face regarding childcare. It turned out that the wait list for childcare, in particular the infant room, is the main issue. Some parents wait up to 24 months to get a slot at the CFC. We had a very constructive meeting with Virginia Huffman from HR and Karen Booth, the director of the CFC and are currently brainstorming and investigating different options to address the issue of hard-to-get infant care on campus. Stay tuned for more updates on this topic; and you are always welcome to email with your ideas, questions or suggestions! ☺

New York City in Film: Stumbling Upon Movie Sets and Actors and Actresses

BERNIE LANGS

It is always a thrill to stumble upon a film crew in New York City (boroughs included), and fun just walking the streets and recognizing a spot that's been in a famous movie. Manhattan is incredibly photogenic for the cinema, from its impressive and daunting skyline to its manicured parks. It's always been amusing to me how certain street scenes in movies make the city look less grimy and dirty than it can be; I'm thinking of the West Side footage in Nora Ephron's *You've Got Mail* in particular. Yet, I've often been in the elaborate courtyard of the building The Apthorp, also featured in an Ephron-penned film, *Heartburn*, and it truly is as spotless as it appears there.

In the late 1970s, I was walking towards the East River one evening in the East 50s, when I saw a film crew in the distance surrounding a park bench overlooking the river and the Queensboro Bridge. There were Woody Allen and Diane Keaton doing a take for the movie *Manhattan*, which, when I saw it in the theater, felt as if Allen truly caught the day-to-day experience of living in the city at that time. In fact, I turned to my friend when coming out of the theater and said it was "like he'd followed us around for a month." Filmed in glorious black and white, it's a postcard of New York. Whenever I see the movie on television and they show the park bench scene, I'm amused to know I was standing behind them up the street. I've seen Woody Allen walking the streets of New York on several occasions, and actually did chance upon another set of his, this time on Madison Avenue, in the 1990s.

Brooklyn Heights is not a big neighborhood and I'll never know how I didn't see the film sets of three movies produced there in the 1980s and 1990s while I was living in Brooklyn. *Moonstruck*, *Prizzi's Honor*, and *The Age of Innocence* were all filmed under my nose. I was especially upset that the late, great director John Huston was eating in all of my favorite restaurants and I kept missing him. It seemed like every waiter in the Heights was saying to me, "John Huston was here just the other day."

I believe Martin Scorsese covered one street around the corner from me with fake snow to capture 19th century society in New York in *The Age of Innocence*. Of course Scorsese went on to film *Gangs of New York* and there's plenty of grime and dirt in that movie—there's more oil in Daniel Day-Lewis's hair in that film than recently spilled in the Gulf of Mexico.

Book Review: *The Surrendered* by Change-rae Lee

JERRY P. MELCHOR

Change-rae Lee's debut novel, *Native Speaker*, is one of my desert island books so his fourth book has quite a benchmark to live up to. *The Surrendered* is a departure from Lee's previous efforts, being epic in scale and not written in the first person. The story centers on the lasting effects of the Korean War on three individuals whose lives intersect at an orphanage: June Han, a Korean orphan introduced in a brilliant but almost too graphically traumatic first chapter; Hector Brennan, an American soldier who stays in Korea after the war and becomes a handyman at the orphanage; and Sylvie Tanner, the wife of a missionary in charge of the orphanage.

June is the definition of resilience and relentlessness, bouncing back from seeing her parents and twin siblings die during the war, eating mud to quiet her hunger, establishing a thriving an-

I was sitting on a bench near the Plaza Hotel right outside of Central Park, when just days after seeing *Marathon Man*, its star, Dustin Hoffman, jogged right by me wearing the exact jogging clothes he'd worn in the movie (moments later, the British rock and roll star Rod Stewart walked by me in English tweeds walking an enormous bulldog—it was a good day for star gazing). I'd heard that when Hoffman was filming his jogging scenes in *Marathon Man*, he would take long spells in mental and physical preparation to immerse in the role. The brilliant actor from Britain who plays opposite of Hoffman in the movie, Laurence Olivier, finally turned to Hoffman in his meditation and faux jogs and said, "Why don't you try acting?"

I scored a double hit with the movie *Scent of a Woman*. I was working on Second Avenue just blocks from the United Nations and the limousine featured in the film that is driving Al Pacino around New York kept rolling by with the actor in the back seat. Pacino plays a blind man in this film and in one scene he is taken to an abandoned area in Brooklyn under the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges to test his driving skills. That area was where I used to jog in the 1980s and he races past all my running places.

My best brush with movie greatness, however, occurred in London. Alfred Hitchcock is one of my favorite directors—I've seen over 30 of his movies. In 1978, I worked in a small Covent Garden building that had been featured in his 1972 movie *Frenzy*. Just recently, I came across the movie on television and when the characters are walking up the stairs of the townhouse, they pass by a large window. I realized that I had climbed that very stairway many times all those years ago, and had gazed out of the very window featured in the film. It was almost as if I was there again.

After *The Witches of Eastwick* was filmed, I saw its stars Jack Nicholson and Michelle Pfeiffer at an art preview at Sotheby's. I also saw Nicholson at the Metropolitan Museum of Art at a Van Gogh show. I was tempted to tell him the colors would be more vibrant without his sunglasses.

If I had to pick the pinnacle of New York in film, it would have to be King Kong atop the Empire State Building in the original version from the 1930s. Unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately—I have not stumbled upon that particular star. ☺

tiques shop in New York City and taking control of the treatment for her stomach cancer. "It was almost laughably ironic, that the cancer should be in her stomach. That she would die with her belly full." Her final wish is to find her son Nicholas (who has run away to Europe after high school while still providing clues of his whereabouts in times of financial need) before she succumbs to the disease. She has made up her mind that Hector, who is Nicholas' father, is to be with her for the trip. Hector and June were briefly married, allowing June into the States. June thinks that since Hector is the boy's father, he should somehow be able to figure out where Nicholas is, and convince him to be his mother's son again.

Hector, despite his movie star good looks and a name from Greek mythology, is a force that pulls people down. He blames



This Month Natural Selections interviews Aaron Steiner, Postdoctoral Associate, Hudspeth laboratory.
Country/State of origin: Billerica, Massachusetts, United States of America, North America, Earth.

New York State of Mind

1. How long have you been living in New York? I moved to New York in October 2006, so almost exactly four years.

2. Where do you live? Scholars Residence. Pretty sweet building and apartment for the price.

3. Which is your favorite neighborhood? My favorite neighborhoods are the East Village and Williamsburg, mostly for the great restaurants.

4. What do you think is the most overrated thing in the city? And underrated?

Overrated? I would say the sports teams. But being from Boston, it's kind of my job to say that. I think it's hard to say that New York is underrated, but I suppose it would be safety... I think people from elsewhere think New York is dangerous, which it clearly isn't.

5. What do you miss most when you are out of town? The ability to order in practically any type of food I want until late into the evening (can you say Burmese food at 11 p.m.?), although the Upper East Side isn't the best neighborhood for variety or staying open late.

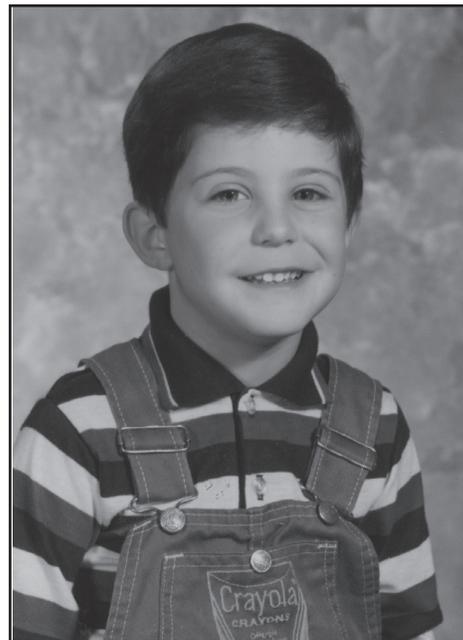
6. If you could change one thing about NYC, what would that be? I would squeeze all the cool neighborhoods together to make travel easier. Put Williamsburg right next to the East Village and Jackson Heights adjacent to the Upper West Side.

7. Describe a perfect weekend in NYC. Sleep in, wander around Central Park, eat a few really good meals, maybe take a boat ride like the Staten Island Ferry or Circle Line, and hit up the Museum of Natural History. Oh, and party at some interesting bars.

8. What is the most memorable experience you have had in NYC? Probably proposing to my wife on the southern edge of Central Park. Some tourists shouted "Say yes!" and a homeless dude on a bike told us to "get a room." Classic NYC.

9. If you could live anywhere else, where would that be? Maybe San Francisco or Boston. Both are awesome cities and I'd love to be on a nice harbor. Outside the US, I would say Barcelona since the food is spectacular (seeing a theme here?) and there's so much culture.

10. Do you think of yourself as a New Yorker? Why? I still think of myself primarily as a Bostonian since that's where I grew up, but I guess I now consider myself a citizen of the world. Mostly the northeastern United States part of the world. ☺



himself for the drowning death of his father—instead of the Friday night routine of picking up his drunk father at the local bar, Hector decides to sleep with a married woman and his father walks off never to be seen again—and goes off to war in hopes of forgetting his guilt, or perhaps of being forgotten. However, Hector has the ability to remain undamaged (he drinks a lot but never gets drunk, fights a lot but his bruises heal by the next day) and escapes being physically hurt during the war, though not psychologically. "It was amazing but, through all the battles and firefights and skirmishes, he'd never been seriously injured: he'd been knifed and shot, even hit by shrapnel, but they were always superficial strikes, glancing off him as if he were shielded by the harder steel of some mysterious fortune." In his mind, maybe rightfully, he considers himself cursed and a curse to those he meets.

At the end of the war Hector helps June into the orphanage, where they meet Sylvie, the beautiful wife of a missionary who is charged with running the orphanage. Sylvie herself is a broken woman: she carries the memory of witnessing her own missionary parents' massacre in Manchuria as a young child; she is a heroin addict; and she is married to a strict and very moral man. June and Hector compete for Sylvie's affection and approval. Hector becomes her lover: "He couldn't help but pause, as everyone did, whenever he caught a glimpse of Sylvie Tanner, her hair as it fell against the grave paleness of her shoulders glowing as vibrantly as anything he had seen since being in this desolated

country." Meanwhile June gets the idea that she will be adopted by the Tanners and taken back to the States. These actions culminate in a fire that destroys the orphanage, from which Hector rescues June but not Sylvie.

June hires a private investigator to look for Hector and to find her son's trail in Europe. Hector is now working as a janitor in a Korean strip mall in New Jersey, trying to squander his time away and, perhaps, to forget the guilt he has accumulated through his life, when June comes back to ask him for a favor: she asks him to rescue her once more.

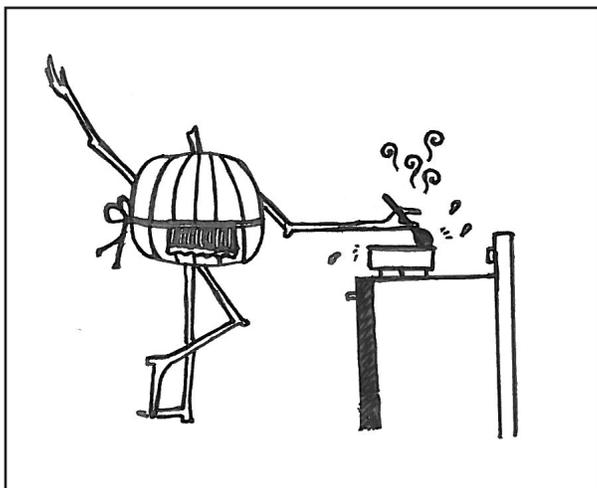
After an accident (a car crash wiping out two people of some importance that seems like another forced plot machination), Hector travels to Italy with June in search of Nicholas.

The three main characters in the book all seem to be running away from something, be it June from her hunger, Hector from his guilt, Sylvie from the pain of her parents' death. The sadness in the novel is felt throughout, and there isn't as much redemption as there is hope, even if it is for the ultimate surrender.

Lee has always created excellent prose. He has precise command of language and his writing is as good as ever in *The Surrendered*. The characters are memorable; the novel is readable and satisfying. However, some of the action tended to be strained; too many coincidences were needed to move the plot forward. In the end—and this should not prevent one from picking this book as an introduction to Lee's elegant works—*The Surrendered* does not supplant *Native Speaker* from my desert island list. ☺

Home Sweet Homemade

CARLY GELFOND



Cartoon by Carly Gelfond

So, I'm on a "homemade" kick. By way of explanation, I offer up an image, circa 1870, of a pioneer housewife in a stiff apron and a billowy floral dress, sleeves rolled up past the elbows, slapping together a pie crust with the nonchalant expertise of a beaver building a dam. Which is certainly not a particularly accurate physical description of me (the pioneer woman, not the beaver—well, both) but rather the model to which I've been aspiring lately.

Recent projects of mine have included homemade: peanut butter, raspberry jam, soft pretzels, Passover matzo, pesto, salad dressings, ketchup, ice pops, granola, borscht, and even my own version of Reese's peanut butter cups (made with, you guessed it, homemade peanut butter). I'll stop there, lest you think my 90-year-old grandmother

has more of a social life than me, which she does.

I can't really say where this newly-surfaced interest in making things from scratch came from. When I was little, my mother used to read me the *Little House on the Prairie* books. I fantasized about being Laura Ingalls Wilder, churning butter, sitting by the hearth listening to Pa's stories or his fiddle-playing as the coyotes howled outside. I recall being both horrified and oddly intrigued when we came to the

part where Laura and her siblings play catch with the balloon-like bladder of a pig that Pa has just slaughtered. A homemade beach ball.

I will also confess that there is something so childishly appealing to me about the idea of stirring the bubbling contents of a big black pot with a giant wooden spoon. I even think it's appealing when done from within the confines of a teensy New York City kitchen with a modern stove splattered with the residue from last night's disastrous attempt at homemade borscht.

It's even more appealing when the pot's contents are gooey and sweet, perfectly spiced, simmering away into something you just can't tell me is inferior to Trader Joe's.

All of which is to say that I'm a little bit obsessed with homemade pumpkin butter right now.

PUMPKIN BUTTER—Adapted from *Smitten Kitchen*

Ingredients:

2 15-ounce cans pumpkin puree, approx. 3 1/2 cups (I like Farmer's Market brand organic pumpkin puree, and look, I realize that you probably expected me to roast my own pumpkin, but the truth is that canned pumpkin puree is actually delicious, and let's be honest: using it might just be the difference between your actually making this pumpkin butter, and simply dashing off to Trader Joe's.)

3/4 cup apple juice

2 teaspoons ground ginger (or to taste—the more ginger, the more kick)

1/2 teaspoon ground cloves

1 1/3 cups brown sugar

1 tablespoon ground cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg

Juice of half a lemon

1. Combine pumpkin, apple juice, spices, and sugar in a large saucepan; stir well. Bring mixture to a boil. Reduce heat, and simmer for 30 minutes or until thickened. Stir frequently (with big wooden spoon), being vigilant, as the butter can be prone to bubbling and "popping" from the heat. Adjust spices to taste. Stir in lemon juice, or more to taste.

2. Once cool, pumpkin butter can be dolloped onto a cup of plain Greek yogurt with granola, smeared across a toasted slice of crusty bread, or, if you're a man or woman after my own heart, spooned directly into the mouth.

(Whatever is leftover can be kept in an airtight container or glass jar in the fridge.)

What's for Lunch?

COLLENE LAWHORN

There is a definite art to packing school lunches. While we respect the mantra of creating healthy well-balanced meals for our kids, we also want them to enjoy their lunches just as much as the rest of their day. At first it was pretty manageable to create that 'health-joy' balance. My then three-year-old was very excited about toting plain whole wheat spaghetti to preschool every day, and he allowed me to throw in a few fruit accompaniments for good measure. By the time he reached age four, plain spaghetti and crunchy fruits were still a staple, but the additional requirement of an afternoon snack became a greater challenge. It wasn't unheard of to get an evening phone call from a flustered

Dad in a supermarket aisle trying to determine the appropriate squeeze tube yogurt flavor or recall the preferred pretzel shape for this month.

I dream of the day when we can say goodbye to our morning lunch packing ritual (and drool over the thought of the extra eight minutes of sleep that I might get from not having to watch a pot of boiling pasta). Soon we'll be off to kindergarten, where I'll look forward to handing over the menu-planning honors to the school cafeteria.

In honor of National School Lunch Week (October 11-15, 2010), the *New York Post* interviewed some students about their view of school lunches¹. One child at a private school was quite pleased with her wide

range of menu options, including a choice of having traditional breakfast foods (Canadian Bacon and French Toast) for lunch, while another child in a public school spoke of her meal consisting of mushy burgers, not-so-fresh fruit, and smelly milk. When I visited "Today's Menu" on the website of one Upper West Side private school, I learned that at this moment, a group of elementary school students will have the option to enjoy: white Miso soup, Kimpira pita, Misoyaki salmon, stewed pumpkin, brown rice and green pea flan. My visits to various New York City public school websites were not quite as revealing.

The New York City Board of Education provides approximately 860,000 meals

(breakfast and lunch) to greater than 1600 public school locations. School breakfast is free and lunch is \$1.50 per family, which is reduced or eliminated for families in need. While the federal government's Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act reimburses New York State \$2.68 per child, many are critical of such a small allocation for lunches². Some argue that access to good nutrition is not only critical for child development, but it's also critical for minimizing future health care costs that can stem from poor nutrition. Furthermore, for some children, a public school lunch may be one of the only options for a regular and reasonably balanced meal.

In addition to the challenge posed to our public schools of providing nutritious meals for our children, we are faced with an additional challenge of managing our chil-

dren's choices to attend food outlets near some public schools. Kathryn Neckerman and colleagues from the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University recently published a study on the disparities in food environments near public schools³. It was shown that most public schools were within a few hundred meters of fast-food restaurants, bodegas and pizzerias which offered fewer healthy options and more low-priced, high-calorie foods. In addition, low-income students were more likely to attend schools with unhealthy food outlets in closer proximity to their school.

So it remains to be seen whether my son will someday boast of a school lunch that is by far more extravagant than the tuna sandwich in my purse. Or, whether or not he will have stories that rival my NYC public school days of fish sticks, tater tots and

canned peaches. But perhaps we will rest easiest by sacrificing the dream of an extra eight minutes of sleep and continuing to pack his lunch for the next fourteen years. Time will tell. ☉

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The Status of the Stem Cell Debate

AILEEN MARSHALL

In recent months there has been some legal wrangling over federal funding of stem cell research. A federal judge ruled that it was illegal for the government to fund stem cell research, based on earlier legislation that prohibits the use of federal funds to take apart an embryo, despite the fact that President Obama allowed the use of more cell lines for research. There was a temporary stay granted on the ban until the courts make a final ruling (which, at the time of this article's publication, has not been made yet). The ban stopped financing all federally funded stem cell research, but the temporary stay has allowed labs to proceed in the meantime, although their future is uncertain.

All of this really started in 1996 with the Dickey-Wicker Amendment. This law prohibits the use of federal monies for "research in which a human embryo ... [is] destroyed, discarded or knowingly subjected to risk of injury or death greater than allowed for research on fetuses in utero." In January of 1999, then National Institutes of Health (NIH) director Harold Varmus ruled, backed up by Health and Human Services (HHS), that human embryonic stem cells (hESCs) are not embryos. Therefore they were not subject to the Dickey-Wicker Amendment. George W. Bush ruled on August 9, 2001 that the NIH could only fund research on cell lines that had been derived before that date. 78 cell lines were put in the NIH registry, but only 21 were viable enough for research. In the meantime some cell lines were derived with private funding.

In March of 2009, President Barack Obama issued an executive order to increase the hESCs available for federal funding. This law also called for the NIH to write guidelines for this research within four months. These new guidelines went into effect on July 7, 2009. All cell lines used must comply with informed consent requirements. Since then, another 74 ESC lines have been approved. The very next month, a lawsuit was filed against the NIH and HHS, saying that the law violated

the Dickey-Wicker Amendment. The plaintiffs included an embryo adoption agency and two researchers working with adult (not embryonic) stem cells, James Sherley of Boston Biomedical Research Institute and Theresa Deisher of AVM Biotechnology. This lawsuit was originally dismissed, but the plaintiffs appealed.

On August 23, 2010, Chief Judge Royce Lamberth of the US District Court in Washington D.C. granted a preliminary ban of federal funding on all hESC research, even on the lines allowed under Bush's ruling, until the case is determined. Consequently, the NIH had to stop all grant reviews and research on these cells. They stopped the funding of 50 grants in peer-review and 22 grants up for renewal, representing the withdrawal of a total of about \$200 million. Then, on September 9 of this year, the Court of Appeals momentarily blocked Lamberth's ruling, allowing federal funding and research to continue for the time being, no matter what the original source of funding.

On September 16, a panel of scientists, including NIH director Francis Collins and Sean Morrison of the University of Michigan, addressed the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education, urging them to elucidate laws on federal funding of hESC research. They noted that federal funds are not used to originate the stem cells, only to maintain the cell line once it has been established, since the source is mostly embryos from fertility clinics destined to be discarded. When asked why research on only adult stem cells couldn't be allowed, they noted that research on both kinds of cells is equally important. One of the scientists on the panel, Dr. George Daley of Harvard Medical School, told the committee, "I have been scrambling to come up with private funding so that I don't have to lay anyone off." On September 27, a federal appeals court began to hear arguments on the ban. They are still ongoing, so the fate of federally funded hESC research in this country is yet to be determined. ☉

Restaurant Review: Torrissi Italian Specialties

ADRIA LE BOEUF

An unassuming store-front buried in the unpleasant tourism of Little Italy is the last place I'd expect to find such a delicious meal, but Torrissi Italian Specialties is full of surprises. We accidentally decided to try Torrissi during the Feast of San Gennaro festival, making the juxtaposition even more striking. When you enter, you are transported to a Little Italy of many decades ago: old tile floor, unassuming curtains, compact tables. There are few choices to be made. The menu is set: a few antipasti, a pasta course, an entree and a collection of dessert cookies and pastries. All of these vary each day, and the ingredients are nicely sourced, mostly from around the US with lots from New York, California, and the southwest. The night I went, of the four antipasti, two stood out: the freshly made mozzarella with garlic tomato bread and the grilled mackerel with lightly pickled eggplant. You cannot imagine the mozzarella and garlic tomato bread just from reading it. The soft warmth of the fresh cheese combined with the piquant acidity of the bread was a huge surprise. The flavor of the mackerel was rich and nuanced and nicely paired with the eggplant. The pasta course, when it arrived, looked like a classic pasta course to me—I've never been a pasta fan—essentially boring. However, a richness of flavor was packed in sharp spicy smoky peppers and fresh greens. For the entrees, two were offered: a grilled trout with fresh corn polenta and okra, and devil's chicken. My dining companion and I shared the two. The devil's

chicken was succulent, coated in a tangy yogurt and with a mix of sweet and smoky chili peppers, leaving you with a slow burn. The trout, though, was our favorite. The fish was cooked perfectly, tender and moist but with a crispy exterior, and the side of fresh polenta was a revelation. Fresh polenta. Think about that. Essentially, from my internet research, this was just ground corn, just bought, and just dried. It was transporting, sweet, moist, creamy, and full of flavor. After the entree, we were given a refreshing lemon Italian ice to cleanse the palate and then a lovely and varied plate of dessert-lettes: rainbow cookies, pizelle cannolis, bourbon cream puffs, and more. A perfect finish. Some version of this lovely experience can be yours nightly for \$50 per person. There are no reservations, so go down there about an hour earlier than you want to eat to put your name down, have a drink or a stroll nearby, and soon enough they'll have a table for you. ☺



Life on a Roll



Fingers by Adria Le Boeuf

