

Home Cooking Episode 11 Transcript

Samin: I'm Samin Nosrat.

Hrishi: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

Samin: And we're Home Cooking, or as the case may be this week, not cooking.

Hrishi: We're home eating.

Samin: Listen, we're in week 40 bajillion of...

Hrishi: They always say that week 40 bajillion, that's always the week when things-

Samin: Everyone can take a week off.

Hrishi: Yeah.

Samin: Listen, even we're allowed to not cook during the pandemic. I've eaten so much dried mango this week, I can't even tell you.

Hrishi: In the spirit of not cooking, but also in the spirit of happy things, I have a question for Samin.

Samin: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Hrishi: This week is Halloween.

Samin: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Hrishi: What is your number one Halloween candy?

Samin: Okay, okay. Okay, I have never been readier. My off the street trick-or-treat candy is Reese's Peanut Butter Cups.

Hrishi: Great.

Samin: Okay, I'm just talking to you salty, sweet. Salty, sweet situation. Love it.. Also when I wrote my candy story for the New York Times Magazine a few years ago, that almost killed me... It nearly killed me, this candy story. I went so deep on my candy reporting, and I learned that the Reese's Peanut Butter Cup is so salty. It's saltier than it is sweet, actually, it's so salty. If you actually just close your eyes and taste it, the

first thing you taste is salt, not sugar. Which is maybe why I love it so much.

Hrishi: Yeah. Is there any acid in it, in Reese's Peanut Butter Cup?

Samin: Well, yeah, chocolate is acidic.

Hrishi: So you might call it a salt, fat, acid treat.

Samin: A salt, fat, acid treat. Not even going to raise my chin up at that. But my true favorite candy of all time, which is not so often found in the trick-or-treat situation, but really, how exciting would it be if it could... is the sour Haribo. Specifically, Sour Streamers or Sour Sghetti.

Hrishi: Okay, so you're not saying Haribo gummy bears.

Samin: No, no, no.

Hrishi: Other shapes.

Samin: Yes, the other shapes are actually preferable because they have a higher proportion of sour to chewy.

Hrishi: Because the sour is like a topical application and there's a greater surface area on the Streamer?

Samin: Correct. There's more surface area. Yes. And the Streamer is my preferable texture because the streamer is a different texture than gummy. It's made with something else that's not the same stuff as the gummy stuff.

Hrishi: How would anybody ever experience this in a trick-or-treat situation?

Samin: I'm not exactly sure, maybe a desperate neighbor just went to Walgreens that's the only place I know to buy it other than the internet.

Hrishi: And so a neighbor has forgotten to find-

Samin: And so maybe a desperate neighbor cleared the shelves of all the Sour Streamers and then generously trick-or-treat gave them out. I don't know.

Hrishi: Yeah, because that's even more than the full candy bar.

Samin: I just needed to proclaim to the world my top two candies, okay?

Hrishi: Okay.

Samin: Sour Streamers.

Hrishi: All right.

Samin: And Reese's.

Hrishi: So in your mode as fancy celebrity...

Samin: Oh, I actually do have a rider

Hrishi: You do?

Samin: I do, yeah. For my speaking events, but I know myself too well. So I do not ask for anything unhealthy on there. I only ask for healthy because otherwise I would be eating an entire bag of Doritos and an entire bag of Sour Streamers.

Hrishi: Yeah, yeah.

Samin: Like, it would be so bad.

Hrishi: Yeah. Once again, welcome to Home Cooking. We are however many minutes in and have not talked about cooking.

Samin: Talked about no cooking.

Hrishi: This is episode 11 of whatever the hell this has become.

Samin: Okay, Hrishi, you tell me now, what's your preferred Halloween candy situation?

Hrishi: Okay, I think my ideal Halloween candy doesn't actually exist, but it would be a Mounds crossed with an Almond Joy.

Samin: Oh, less almonds, you mean?

Hrishi: No, no. Have the almond in dark chocolate.

Samin: Oh.

Hrishi: Dark chocolate Almond Joy. Would that be good?

Samin: That sounds like that would be totally good.

Hrishi: Yeah, I think so.

Samin: Let's Google it.

Hrishi: I love Almond Joys so much. I love the combination of coconut and almond. I love the combination of coconut and chocolate. I love the combination of chocolate and almonds. So really, it's a Venn diagram of three combinations.

Samin: It totally exists, it just comes in a brown wrapper. It's called dark chocolate Almond Joy.

Hrishi: Dark chocolate Almond Joy.

Samin: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I'm going to buy it for you right now.

Hrishi: Thank you, send it with my banana bread. I only recently found out that Almond Joys are maybe not as popular, that people don't like Almond Joys.

Samin: I feel like I know that. I know that.

Hrishi: What are people's problem? What is the problem here? Wait, I'm just going to, hold on, I'm going to play a bit of Karen.

Karen: What is the problem here?

Hrishi: Karen rules. Anyway, Almond Joys are so good.

Samin: No, my experience is that there are a lot of people out there who don't like nuts in things. They like nuts, fine. They don't like nuts in things.

Hrishi: Huh. I thought it would be the coconut that was the thing that people had an issue with.

Samin: I think Mounds and Almond Joy are not two of the most popular candy bars.

Hrishi: Well, that's fine. More for me. Unfortunately, in the seven Halloweens that I have spent in this house I have never once gotten a trick-or-treater.

Samin: Really? Oh, but all these previous years you've never gotten a trick-or-treater?

Hrishi: Not even one. But I always, with a sense of optimism, go to the store and get a few things of-

Samin: Get a whole bunch of Almond Joy.

Hrishi: Almond Joys, Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, Kit-Kat, Twix, Lindsey is a Snickers fan, so some combination of those. And put them by the door, ready to hand out and then inevitably, not one child.

Samin: Wow.

Hrishi: But, speaking of children, let us turn to our first question.

Samin: Oh, okay.

Hrishi: This comes from somebody you actually know.

Samin: Oh!

Aliza: Hi, Samin Khala, this is Aliza, I just turned nine this week. As you know we're living up in the Hindu Kush mountains in Chitral, Pakistan, in a conservancy area for snow leopards and markhor. We're doing a lot of cooking and baking with my family, mainly my mother, but I had a question for you. Well, because we are raising our own chickens because they're healthier than the ones you'd find in the bazaar but the only problem is that our chickens are skinnier and a little bit tougher than the other ones. So do you have any suggestions, recipes or cooking techniques that'll help us make it tastier?

Samin: Oh, that's my buddy Aliza. She's my best friend from college's daughter, and her sister Roya so good to hear from you guys. And they really live a special life in rural Pakistan. So this is a good tip for anybody, not only if you're doing as they're doing and raising your own meat birds, but if you maybe are buying heritage birds from the farmers market or if you've subscribed to a CSA or also Thanksgiving is coming up, and if you end up buying a heritage turkey and sometimes those heritage turkeys can have tougher meat than the traditional broad breasted, white turkeys that we're used to cooking. This is all sort of similar kind of advice that will work for it. So because these sort of ultimate free range pastured birds are not fed these heavy carbohydrate diets and fattened up in quite the same ways and they're much more muscular, they do have tougher meat and they will definitely benefit from a different kind of cooking that is more like stewing or braising. But you don't have to make just Pakistani cuisine, you could make any sort of stew or braise or even a pasta sauce, anything where you slow cook it in a pot, and any sort of vegetables, like onions and maybe garlic and carrots and some liquid,

whether that's stock or water and just let it slow cook until it's falling off the bone. And then that's really when you'll be able to pick it off the bone and let it sort of just turn into a delicious sauce that you eat over rice or over pasta, or I know your dad loves fresh bread so you can sop it up with fresh bread and yogurt. And that will be how it will be the most delicious.

Hrishi: Awesome. By the way, the email that Aliza's mom sent is so sweet, first of all she addressed it to me and she said, "Hi Hrishikesh, I grew up in Southern California and Samin was the very first person I met at Berkeley. We both did our junior year abroad in the UK, which is where I met my husband to be. Samin is the only non family member who has visited me in Pakistan after I moved here. I adore her beyond words and our whole family has been listening to your podcast."

Samin: Awe, so cute.

Hrishi: How sweet is that?

Samin: They're my buddies. I love them so much.

Hrishi: Well, while we're at a moment of cuteness, I'm just going to keep it going. Here we go.

Izzy: Hi, Hrishi and Samin- I have a question about broccoli. My mom usually makes broccoli with garlic, or roast it. But me and my brother are kind of getting tired of it, so what are some other ways of making broccoli?

Samin: That's the cutest thing.

Hrishi: It's too cute. It's too cute.

Samin: Who is that?

Hrishi: That is Izzy, she's five years old and she's writing on behalf of her and her brother Liam, who is seven.

Samin: Oh, my gosh. Izzy and Liam. That is the cutest thing I've ever heard.

Hrishi: Their mom, Esther, says that for the record, she also makes broccoli fritters and she's put it on pizza with pesto. But I guess it doesn't cut it, so any other kid friendly broccoli ideas you got?

Samin: Okay. Ooh, I like this one. Okay, mom. Esther, have you ever thought about turning the broccoli into the pesto?.

Hrishi: So you would, in addition to say basil, you would throw the broccoli into the blender with your pine nuts?

Samin: Yeah, I think what I would do is just cut it up into small pieces, into florets and blanch it in some salty water until it's just tender. And then add it into the blender or the food processor, either along with the basil or even without basil. I think in the winter, you can make it just with broccoli, and Parmesan and pine nuts. You can leave the basil out completely if you can't find any. Or you can sneak a little basil in there if you can get your hands on some. But it's just a slightly different, you know, kale pesto's its own whole thing where people make kale pesto with just kale and no basil. And I think you can absolutely make broccoli pesto as well.

Hrishi: Awesome. I had one one idea.

Samin: Ooh, yeah. What's your idea?

Hrishi: It's not something that I've made myself, but I have thought about it because I love quiche. But I'm a little intimidated to make an entire quiche and get it wrong and just the crust and everything. It's a little bit beyond my comfort zone. But one thing I have been thinking about is a little broccoli and cheese, egg muffin.

Samin: Like you make them in muffin tins, you mean?

Hrishi: Exactly. Yeah, you make it in muffin tins, so you don't have to worry about a crust or anything like that. It appeals to the kid in me to have this tiny little-

Samin: Little thing you can pick up and eat with your fingers.

Hrishi: Exactly.

Samin: I love that. I do love that. I would probably cook the broccoli first, though, so that it's not going in raw. Because with that I would want the egg part to be just barely cooked, whereas the broccoli would still be raw, not get cooked.

Hrishi: So maybe you'd steam it?

Samin: Yeah, I would either steam it or just blanch it and some salty water, just until it's barely, barely tender.

Hrishi: Yeah

Samin: And I will say, broccoli is kind of my go-to, and also rapini which is kind of , I think of as like bitter broccoli.

Hrishi: Broccoli that's been rejected a whole lot.

Samin: Yeah, I mean, that's why I like it. I feel really like a kinship with it. Those are my go-to vegetables that I keep in the freezer. When I started traveling for work a couple of years ago very regularly, and coming home to empty refrigerators or just refrigerators filled with rotting food. I realized, "Oh God, I have to take better care of myself because otherwise all I'm ever going to be eating is toast and cheese, toast and cheese, toast and cheese. And so I really got into the habit of making sure I had a well stocked freezer filled with all sorts of good frozen vegetables, so that when I did get home after a long trip, I could always make myself a nice pasta or a soup with filled with vegetables, or even just so that I didn't have to rush out to the store every time my fridge got low. And that has really saved me a lot of times and that mentality has been certainly helpful throughout this period. So broccoli pasta, I would say a cheesy broccoli pasta, I can't imagine a child not enjoying that. To me, cheese and broccoli are such best friends. I do know a lot of kids who strangely are kind of averse to cheese, but I feel like if you as a kid like broccoli, you probably will be okay with cheese, too. So Parmesan is a nice friend to broccoli, so I think even just a delightful sort of broccoli that's been dunked into salty water and drizzled with olive oil and some grated Parmesan, as simple as that is, is really pleasing for some little people to pick up with their fingers.

Hrishi: Yeah.

Samin: Or big people, as Hrishi seems to be drawn to that too.

Hrishi: Yeah. Oh my gosh, Parmesan, broccoli, egg muffin. Maybe I'll try it.

Samin: I think you totally should.

Hrishi: I feel like that's within my skills.

Samin: What I would do is I would whisk together some eggs, finally grate the Parmesan, if you have a microplane grater. I know at your house, you don't use very many rich dairy products, but if you found yourself with a spoonful of cream or sour cream, I would add that in there because that's going to buy you a little bit of margin for error in the baking. It's just going to make it a little bit more... it's going to get you a little more

custardy texture in the baking. And then I would butter or grease the muffin cups, and then pour that custard in and then place your cooked broccoli in there. And then maybe if you have another kind of cheese, like a meltier kind of cheese, a little piece of cheddar or monterey jack or something, little cubes of that. So you get two textures of cheeses and two flavors of cheeses. Ooh, what a treat.

Hrishi: Yeah, that sounds great.

Samin: And then you could even put little grated cheese on top. So you get that browning on top. Ooh, yeah.

Hrishi: All right. I'm going to try it.

Samin: Do it.

Hrishi: Related to the broccoli with cheese idea, maybe, I don't know. I don't want to answer for you. We got this question from Ashley.

Ashley: So thanks to COVID I now live with two wonderful cooks. My mother who makes the best authentic Spanish food and my sister who can whip up meals like beef bourguignon, and other fancy treats I really can't pronounce. I, on the other hand, only have my homemade mac and cheese to bring to the table. So I was wondering is if you have any advice and how to make a real show stopper mac and cheese that can compete with my talented family. Thanks.

Samin: Okay. I don't think the answer is broccoli. The thing about mac and cheese is it's so personal, people really have like nostalgia and family, there's just so many personal opinions. Do you want to describe for me what your ideal mac and cheese is, Hrishi?

Hrishi: I mean, for me, it really is just my sister could make the best mac and cheese, it's just Kraft, just out of the box, you know? But it was great.

Samin: That's what you love.

Hrishi: Yeah.

Samin: So I mean, I love a box one and then I really love a very well made creamy, delicious one that's homemade with a delicious béchamel sauce.

Hrishi: Oh, wow.

Samin: And the bread crumbs on top and the contrast of the crispy crunchy bread crumbs and the creamy comforting sauce.

Hrishi: Oh, yeah, that's something I got introduced to much later. And I was like, "Oh, I didn't even know mac and cheese could be like this!"

Samin: Totally. But I will say, one of my problems with homemade mac and cheese is if people make it wrong, or they get it wrong, or something happens to the white sauce, to the béchamel sauce in the oven and it breaks or it splits apart. And then it becomes grainy or greasy, or if you don't use the right cheese, if it's not sharp enough cheese, I don't feel like you get that cheesy taste. It just kind of looks orange but doesn't taste cheesy. So to me, the things that I have figured out over time are it's important to use a variety of cheeses. I think some Parmesan is really good in there, I think you want to use something a little bit on the stinkier side, like Gruyere or fontina. And those are both good too because they have a good sort of melty, pulley thing that happens, like the stringy goodness.

Hrishi: Yeah, yeah.

Samin: I do like the orange color. So I like having some cheddar in there too for the orange, because I always want there to be some nice sharpness, I would go for a very sharp cheddar. But I've noticed that cheddars tend to do the separation and have the graininess. So something I learned during COVID, and this might be something you're not comfortable with Ashley, and this might not be what you're going for, but this is my own mac and cheese journey that I've been on during COVID. So I'm very excited to share this with you. I have definitely watched my share of cooking videos during this time. And I spent some time watching some of Kenji López-Alt's GoPro videos early in the thing he had his GoPro stuck to his head, and he was cooking late at night, and he was making this grilled cheese in his kitchen. And I learned this thing because he always works science facts into his cooking. And so he was making a grilled cheese sandwich, and he mixed his cheeses, which I always do. And he used a slice of American cheese along with a bunch of other kinds of cheeses. And the reason he used the slice of American cheese is because the American cheese has an additive called sodium citrate in it. And one of my favorite things about American cheese is that it melts into that perfectly even glossy texture. And so he explained in the video that even just a tiny bit of sodium citrate in that slice of American cheese as it melts into that grilled cheese sandwich. It will help all of the cheeses

in the grilled cheese sandwich melt in this perfect way so that when he slices his grilled cheese, it gets that classic diner meltiness, rather than the kind of separation that I'm describing. So once Kenji mentioned the sodium citrate, I couldn't get it out of my mind. And then I realized I could just buy a thing of sodium citrate off the internet. So I just bought a jar of sodium citrate, and you can just mix a tiny bit of sodium citrate into your mac and cheese, there are a bunch of recipes for it. This is one of those molecular gastronomy tricks, and that's how Velveeta cheese is made.

Hrishi: Huh.

Samin: So you can make essentially your own homemade Velveeta or your own homemade nacho cheese out of any quality cheese that you want, using the highest quality cheddar, whatever delicious quality, amazing cheeses that you buy at the store, but you get that incredible, incredible creamiest texture. With just like, you just use a tiny, tiny pinch of sodium citrate. And all you do is you just basically add the sodium citrate into the pot and you melt it with a little bit of water and the cheese and it turns into, before your very eyes, it turns into essentially Velveeta cheese sauce.

Hrishi: But like highbrow Velveeta.

Samin: Yeah, using whatever mixture of delicious, delicious, delicious, fanciest cheeses. And then you mix that with your par cooked noodles, you know I buy like bronze die extruded fancy pastas. Then you put them in your casserole, and then you cover that with your whatever bread crumbs, or if you want to use panko that you've like tossed with butter, and then you throw that in the oven and out comes this thing where people are going to be like, "I don't understand, how did you get this texture and this flavor out of a home kitchen? It seems impossible." And you will never tell them your secret but it's sodium citrate.

Hrishi: I feel like this will be a game changer for a lot of people.

Samin: I hope you like this trick. If you don't like it, I would say look for look for a classic béchamel recipe, and if you do need one, I tested béchamel recipes a bunch of times this year and really perfected mine in my big lasagna for the New York Times and we will link to that in the recipes as well, so that's a way that you can sort of make a base béchamel and work some cheeses into that for your mac and cheese.

Hrishi: Thanks Ashely, I hope that impresses your family. Okay, here is a question from Amy.

Amy: I have a breakfast question. I had dental surgery and have to be on a soft food diet for about a month. Part two of this procedure is coming up and I'm already bored of my breakfast options, which has mostly been scrambled eggs and avocado or hot cereal or yogurt with some soft fruit. And then on the weekends when I have a little bit more time, some pancakes maybe. Can you suggest some alternatives I can rotate in, so I don't end up associating these foods with the dental work and then never eat them again? Thanks so much.

Hrishi: Plus, there's a note that Amy includes that I love that she said, according to her dentist she needs to avoid, "Anything that makes noise when you eat it."

Samin: Oh!

Hrishi: Which I think is a really good guide.

Samin: Okay, my suggestion, because I can't think of anything else that's a typical "American" breakfast food to add to this. I'm thinking we got to go to other countries and other parts of the world.

Hrishi: Okay.

Samin: So I'm thinking, porridges of the world.

Hrishi: Yeah. Well, there's of course porridges of America, grits.

Samin: Oh, great one. Porridges of America. Let's start with grits. Okay, great one. Okay, didn't even think about that. So what do you know about grits?

Hrishi: I mean, I've eaten them. I know it comes from cornmeal.

Samin: Okay.

Hrishi: And to make it taste good, you need to add a lot of butter and a lot of cheese.

Samin: Okay, yeah. So grits or polenta, I think you can do and those are just two different sort of ways that corn is ground. And grits can take quite a lot of time commitment. If you have an instant pot or a rice cooker or slow cooker or something you could make grits in that. But grits usually

definitely benefit from an overnight soak. And polenta, you don't have to soak as much, but either of those you could do and you could go sweet direction or savory direction. I agree with Hrishi that a nice generous dollop of butter. Whatever cheese you've got, dollop of a mascarpone if you've got that or sour cream.

Hrishi: Some black pepper.

Samin: Oh yeah, some black pepper. You could go the sweet direction with a some brown sugar or maple syrup. Those are all nice things to add to the grits family. Also, I enjoy a poached egg on top of a grit, and that's plenty soft, you can let that sort of run in there. And that's pretty delicious. I like a hot sauce, poached egg, grit combo myself, with some cheese that's totally soft and makes no noise. So there we go. We've started in America. And then I think continuing with your slow cooker and/or Instant Pot, or you could also make it the night before and reheat it, we go to other parts of the world. In Iran, there is a dish called haleem, which is made with either turkey or chicken, and usually wheat berries that are slow cooked together with water or stock, or sometimes milk for a very, very long time. And you could do it overnight in a slow cooker. And it's cooked so long that the meat kind of falls apart. And you add some, I know this is going to sound so counterintuitive, but you add some cinnamon to it or sometimes a little cardamom. And it's, I don't know, it was one of the comfort foods for me as a kid. It was super delicious. We would have it sometimes on the weekend. It's like a mountain winter comfort food. It's really tasty with some ghee on top. It's a delicious porridge that I love. To me, I'm like, "Go the porridge route, sister."

Hrishi: So I relate to this because I had dental surgery last year. And I got by on a lot of smoothies.

Samin: Oh.

Hrishi: You know, it's not a meal really, but it can be pretty filling. And I made mine with frozen strawberries, frozen blueberries, a banana, spinach and almond milk. And they're great, really got me through, that would be my go to.

Samin: I'm definitely really into the smoothie route as well.

Hrishi: Actually, Samin, you know what would be another good soft food actually?

Samin: Hmm?

Hrishi: Have you ever heard of the Indian dish upma?

Samin: No, How do you spell it?

Hrishi: U-P-M-A

Samin: No I don't think I know that.

Hrishi: It's really good, and it's a comfort food for me. And it's soft, it's made of cream of wheat.

Samin: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Hrishi: Actually my dad, so you know my mom's health doesn't allow her to cook anymore.

Samin: Oh yeah, that's why Sumesh Uncle is big with the air fryer.

Hrishi: Exactly, exactly. Well there were times when I would go visit where my dad is now in charge of the cooking, and we would have this like three meals a day. Which is fine it's really good, but he's really good at-- actually should we call my dad and see if he will tell us the recipe.

Samin: Um yes, absolutely. Any excuse to call him!

Hrishi: Uh, okay yeah this is definitely one of his specialties. Okay, let me see if I can get him on this. Hi dad!

Sumesh: Hi

Samin: Hi, Sumesh Uncle!

Sumesh: Hi Samin, how are you?

Samin: Oh I am so happy to be talking to you! I don't know if you know this but you have a lot of fans on the internet.

Sumesh: Oh!

Samin: Did you know that?

Sumesh: No I didn't.

Hrishi: So dad, we got a question from someone who is having dental surgery and she needs to eat soft foods.

Sumesh: Okay.

Hrishi: And so one of the foods that I thought of was upma.

Sumesh: Yes.

Hrishi: And I remember that this was one of the dishes that when mom wasn't cooking as much you started making really often.

Sumesh: Right.

Hrishi: How did you learn how to make upma?

Sumesh: Well, it is actually happen before my marriage.

Hrishi: Oh really?

Samin: Really?

Sumesh: Yeah, so I was in, at UMass Amherst and I had my American roommate but once in a while, we had a lot of Indian friends and there were five Indian girls there.

Hrishi: Dad.

Sumesh: And one time a made up mine and called them up and they said, "Oh I loved it." So they became my number one customers, and then when I got married and I showed that to mom and she laughed like anything and she said "This is nothing like upma." Because I didn't have any seasonings, nothing, it was plain. And so upma is what you call seasoned cream of wheat or semolina. And so I used to just have some onions, fry them out, and then put a little salt, sugar, and then boil that water and put the cream of wheat. But in real way, you need lots of seasonings that you can add.

Hrishi: So then did mom show you the way that she makes upma?

Sumesh: She didn't show me. I learned by myself, you know?

Hrishi: She just gave you the criticism, this sounds a lot like mom, she just told you that it was wrong...

Sumehs: Right.

Hrishi: And then you had to figure out how to make it better.

Sumesh: Right. So let's stay with what your friend wants, so one of the thing which I had added has been roasted cashews or peanuts, but for our friend we cannot have that.

Hrishi: Yeah, yeah.

Sumesh: Yeah, so we can make it a little simple. So you can have a mustard seed and cumin, those are like the spices. And onion, which we had to brown it up, salt, sugar, and then I add a lot of peas, so you can have frozen peas.

Hrishi: Oh yeah, those should be okay right Samin? The peas get soft enough.

Samin: Oh yeah, totally!

Hrishi: If you can eat scrambled eggs you can eat a soft pea.

Sumesh: And cilantro and grated coconut.

Hrishi: Coconut, okay.

Samin: Ohh this sounds delicious!

Hrishi: It's really good.

Samin: How thick do you make it?

Sumesh: Well, usually, you take one cup of semolina, three cups of water.

Samin: That's like about my same proportion or polenta or something.

Hrishi: So the first thing is you chop up a bunch of onions.

Sumesh: Yes, right. And then before that you also add a little bit of green pepper, chopped green pepper.

Samin: And by green pepper, we mean green chile-

Sumesh: Green chiles right.

Samin: So like serano or yeah something like that.

Hrishi: Okay, so you heat up your oil, you put in cumin seeds and mustard seeds.

Sumesh: Yes.

Hrishi: Once those pop you put in green chile pepper, and then your onion.

Sumesh: And your onion and brown it up, you can have chopped ginger and separately you do, boil the peas, but before that hand the first step is, you have to brown the semolina separately in a skillet.

Samin: Oh you have to toast the semolina too?

Sumesh: The semolina right, so that gives you the flavor.

Hrishi: So separately, from the, while the spices are cooking...

Samin: But in like a dry pan like, not in oil, you toast it in a dry pan.

Sumesh: Dry pan, and you keep it aside. And when the whole water is boiling that's when you add the brown semolina.

Samin: And then add the peas into the onions, add the water, bring it to a boil.

Sumesh: Right

Samin: And then stream the semolina in whisking to prevent lumps, because otherwise what happens when you're doing polenta or any kind of porridge like this, is you'll get these lumps of starch that like never dissolve. These like horrible, uncooked, dry lumps or semolina, or polenta, or flour. You have to go slowly and whisk continuously.

Sumesh: Right.

Samin: And then do you cook stirring the whole time over low heat?

Sumesh: Yes, and then you add, after it's completely become thickened, then you add ghee on the top.

Samin: And then you cook it until it just doesn't taste like raw flour anymore.

Sumesh: Yes, right.

Samin: So how long does that, ten minutes maybe?

Sumesh: Five to ten minutes, it will be having.

Samin: Five to ten minutes.

Sumesh: Yeah, because you already have pre-browned the--

Samin: You already toasted it.

Sumesh: toasted it up, right.

Hrishi: And when do you add the salt and sugar?

Sumesh: You can add the salt and sugar when you added the water.

Samin: Yeah, that's when I would have added it too.

Sumesh: And then after that's all done, season with the coconut, grated coconut and grated cilantro.

Samin: Ooh, delicious.

Sumesh: Yeah, but since this person mentioned that she can't have crunch

Samin: Oh, she can't chew.

Sumesh: We are deleting cashews and we are deleting peanuts.

Hrishi: Oh, the cashews are, for anyone thinking about making this who does not have to have soft foods, the cooked cashews in the upma are my favorite part. A perfect bite has a cashew, a pea, and some of the upma. That is a perfect bite because it has a little bit of that crunch in it and the pea is soft in it's own way and then the upma has its own texture. It's so delicious.

Samin: Now I'm starving. This sounds so good.

Sumesh: And you serve with squeezing, you squeeze some lemon on it.

Samin: Oh, yes. Familiar.

Sumesh: So that adds acid, you know. All of Samin's things salt, acid. So some people can use the chutney, you know Indian chutney if you want to have.

Hrishi: But this is traditionally a breakfast food, right dad?

Sumesh: Yeah, it's especially in South India.

Hrishi: Does mom now approve of your upma finally?

Sumesh: Oh yes, she does.

Hrishi: Okay, thanks for the recipe dad.

Samin: We love you!

Sumesh: Thank you so much.

Samin: I can't wait to try this, I'll let you know next time.

Sumesh: Okay.

Samin: I have everything, I have all the semolina and everything.

Sumesh: Okay.

Hrishi: Good luck with the surgery Amy.

Samin: Yeah, best of luck.

Hrishi: So one of the restaurants that's been keeping me fed in moments when I am not cooking is a place that you introduced me to Samin. Sonoratown, here in downtown LA. And coming up we are going to talk to one of the owners of the restaurant Jen Feltham. But before we do that will you just explain to people what Sonoratown's deal is?

Samin: Yeah, it's just a little Mexican restaurant in downtown LA that specializes in the food of the Northern Mexican state of Sonora, which is known for flour tortillas and cooking over wood fire and it's run by this wonderful couple, Jen and Teo. And so I had the great fortune of getting to know them and writing a column about Sonoratown a couple years ago. And I think since then they've been featured in a ton of press. They've gotten really big.

Hrishi: Yeah, they've gotten so, so popular.

Samin: Which is so awesome for them and so sad for us.

Hrishi: Here's my question for you, Jen. So for me, Sonoratown is such a comfort food. I don't know what it is, because it's not food that I grew up with specifically. I was introduced to this restaurant two years ago by Samin, but it makes me feel so comfy and happy when I eat it. Here's my question. What do you make for yourself when you want to feel that kind of comfort?

Jen: You're going to think I'm crazy when I tell you, but it's the truth. I think the reason Sonoratown has been something that people can really connect to is because it's really simple food. It's not fussy. It's not complicated. It's definitely stuff that you could make at home. It's just when you do, it takes a lot of time. Since I'm pretty busy with the restaurant a lot of the time, what we eat almost, I don't know, five or six days a week embarrassingly, but it's the truth, is pinto beans. The way

that Teo's dad taught us to make it is in a clay pot, It just takes time, unfortunately. And we use the Instant Pot now. The basic recipe that we use is literally just salt. Just the slow, slow simmering with the lid a little bit uncovered and then you've got to keep tasting your water because the broth just becomes so delicious. You want to make sure that it's properly salted. That's the basic recipe, but from there you can do anything. I've been using the Instant Pot before I leave for work in the morning and just throwing it in there with maybe a whole onion, a whole garlic clove. I'll put in some dried chilies.

Hrishi: Wait, a whole onion, actually, literally, a whole onion?

Jen: That's actually something I learned at Sonoratown, because the ladies in the kitchen, yeah, we do use rice cookers. Sometimes they won't peel the garlic or the onion. They'll just throw it in.

Samin: I do that too.

Jen: Something I really like to do, though, also, is if we have any leftover tortillas that have been sitting in the fridge that are maybe hardened or old and there's nothing that we can really do with them, I'll also throw them into the pot.

Samin: Wait, corn or flour?

Jen: Corn.

Samin: Okay.

Jen: I haven't tried flour, but I'm sure that would work too. But no, this is in that same sort of thing where it adds that really beautiful corn flavor to it. It also thickens it, which is something that's always good in beans. And we keep them in the fridge after they cool and then refry them when it's time to eat dinner, with just one serrano chile that gets blistered in olive oil first, and then the beans go in that ripping hot oil. We mash it up with a potato ricer or a potato masher. Yeah, that's like every night's dinner, with Sonoratown flour tortillas, or corn tortillas if we have them in the fridge, like I said. Yeah, so good.

Hrishi: I love that. Is it something that makes you happy when you eat it, or it's just something you're doing because you have no time because you're too busy making meals that make other people happy?

Jen: Okay, so when I met Teo, I was 20, and he was 18. When I went over to his house, we ate his dad's beans together with some queso fresco and Tapatío in it, and I thought it was really delicious. But then I went over to his house again, and we did that again. Then I went over to his house again, and then we did that again. I was like, "Whoa, what's wrong with you? How can you eat this meal every day of the week?" He's like, "It's my favorite thing to eat, my dad's beans. I love it, and I could eat it every day of the week." So I embarked on this mission, being an American girl, I felt like, "I'm going to teach him or show him about all the different things. He obviously is doing this just because he hasn't eaten delicious foods yet." So we went to all of these nice restaurants, and he liked all that stuff, but I think I never was able to convince him out of the fact that if something were to happen, that this struggle meal would be something that he could easily do every day, and he ended up winning me over, funny enough. After doing it enough times, I just crave it. I love the flavor of it. It tastes so comforting to me and wholesome, and I feel like it's changed my whole digestive system too.

Hrishi: That's amazing. How come they don't sell pinto beans by the pint? It seems like a no-brainer.

Jen: At Sonoratown?

Hrishi: Just anywhere.

Samin: Hrishi-

Hrishi: Pinto-

Samin: Hrishi, Hrishi, Hrishi-

Hrishi: Pint o Pinto pints-

Samin: She doesn't deserve this from you. Just stop.

Jen: We do sell it now because of the pandemic. You can buy it if you want to.

Hrishi: As a pint?

Samin: No, Jen, he's-

Jen: Yeah, you can.

Hrishi: And do you call it Pint o Pinto?

Jen: Now we do, because that's a million-dollar idea right there. You just made me rich, I think.

Hrishi: Thank you. That's what I'm always trying to tell Samin. These are million-dollar ideas. It would be really truly a dream come true, if pinto-o-pinto made it onto the Sonoratown menu, or really just anywhere. It would be the greatest gift.

Jen: All right, it's yours. You can have that gift.

Hrishi: Amazing. Gift for me, punishment to Samin. I mean it's a win-win.

Samin: What did I do to deserve this? This is not fair.

Hrishi: Thank you so much Jen.

Samin: Thank you so much for your time.

Jen: Thanks so much for having me you guys.

Hrishi: Sonoratown is just an amazing restaurant. If you're in Los Angeles, you can order takeout, get curbside pickup or delivery. And I cannot recommend it more. Thank you Samin, so much for introducing me to them.

Samin: Anytime. Everyone go there. You can follow them on Instagram @sonoratownla. And order yourself a pint of pinto.

Hrishi: Billion dollar idea.

Hrishi: So last in our last episode, with Jason Mantzoukas, you two talked a little bit about cooking with the cast iron pan.

Samin: My favorite pan.

Hrishi: And it turns out, we've actually gotten a lot of questions about cooking with cast iron pans. And so I dug some of those out. And I wanted to play them for you and see if there's any answers you might have for some of our listeners.

Samin: Is this gonna be like a lightning round?

Hrishi: Yeah lightning round.

Samin: Okay, hit me bubba.

Carly: My name is, Carly.

Jacob: My name is, Jacob.

Carly: I have a cast iron pan but I find that every time I cook with it, whatever I'm cooking gets stuck and burnt and caked on.

Jacob: It's really hard for me to tell whether I'm getting a normal amount of stuff stuck on it that I need to scrape or soak off or whether it's because my seasoning isn't built up enough yet.

Carly: So I'm looking for some advice on how to make sure that my food doesn't get stuck to my cast iron.

Samin: Okay, one, it sounds like you have not properly seasoned your pan. So you may need to add a few more layers of seasoning. So that's just oil that's been baked on at a high enough temperature to become carbonized. And become sort of that black layer that we all sort of are all so protective of that we're like, "Don't scrub it off, don't scrub it off." So to do that, you want to use a very small amount of oil, I like to rub it onto a sort of a clean dish towel and rub it on to my hot pan like over my very hot flame, very carefully, and then put it into a 400 degree oven for 30 minutes. And then that's one layer. And then so you might want to repeat that a few times. The other part of your problem, it sounds like you might be starting your cooking in a cold pan. So in general, with almost all cooking and almost all pans, but definitely in a cast iron, I recommend starting in a warm or even hot pan. The only exception really, is with butter, which will just immediately turn into burnt butter, or other very, very delicate things. But in general, you want to go into a hot pan to prevent sticking.

Hrishi: Yeah, I'm pretty sure you told me this once. And now I hear these words every time ago to turn on the stove. "Never cook in cold oil and never put oil in a cold pan."

Samin: Yeah, exactly.

Hrishi: So I was like, "Okay, heat the pan. Okay, now heat the oil."

Samin: Exactly.

Hrishi: And let's we go.

Samin: Exactly. What I like to use for my cast iron pan, is pretty much my favorite kitchen tool, is a stainless steel scrubby. So that's how I wash mine is just with water and a stainless steel scrubby. Or if I don't have

one of those around, I'll use salt. I'll heat up my pan, dump a whole bunch of kosher salt or coarse salt into my pan and rub it around with like a dirty kitchen towel or whatever. And then dump that salt out. And so that coarse salt will rub away whatever you don't want but not destroy the seasoning and the stainless steel scrubby will do the same thing.

Hrishi: I think that's super helpful, but it leads me to my last question in this lightning round which is a more fundamental one about cast iron pans.

Kat: I'm calling y'all because I am afraid of my cast iron skillet.

Samin: Awe, don't be afraid.

Kat: I used it once to make an egg and the amount of time and the amount of hassle and rules that go with it, I just don't 100% understand why you would use a cast iron skillet instead of just a regular pan. And I would like to learn how to use it. My husband is mostly vegan, so if I'm going to go to the hassle of washing that thing and looking after it like it's a little child, I would like to make something that we'd both be able to eat. Do you have any ideas for me?

Hrishi: Why cook in a cast iron pan when it requires all of this extra work?

Samin: I don't know what kind of egg you were making, but I will say, sometimes I just pull down my nonstick pan and fry an egg in my nonstick or make scrambled eggs in my nonstick. Listen, sometimes the cast iron's not worth the hassle for me either. So you're not wrong, I don't disagree with you. But I will say, probably the most used pan in my life is my cast iron. And that's because I find it to be incredibly versatile, I can go from stove top into the oven without worry. And mostly, more than anything, because I am a fiend for browning, there is no comparison to the quality of browning that you can get in a cast iron pan. And so just the way that vegetables will brown, the way that chicken skin will brown... I know that your partner will not enjoy that, but the way that food will sort of evenly stay warm over a low flame. It does take some getting used to, but it is so incredibly versatile and so incredibly controllable once you do get to know it, that, in my opinion, it is worth investing that time to go through that learning curve. I often take for granted the fact that I... I'm a bigger person, I have big bones, I have a bigger frame, I've always been strong. And so I don't really think about people who have a hard time picking up heavy stuff in the kitchen. And so I do know that that's a consideration for a lot of people with cast iron cookware, is sometimes they're like, "I don't want to deal with this heavy hot thing. It's scary to pick up this

heavy hot thing, I'm going to burn myself, I'm going to drop it." So if that's a fear, that's a really real fear that I think you should take seriously. And I'm not going to pressure anyone into that. But I will say, if that is something that you think you can work past, it's worth sort of investing the time to get to know how to use this pan, certainly for its browning qualities if for nothing else.

Hrishi: Okay, awesome. Well, that was a good lightning round, or I guess with the pan seasoning we should have called it a darkening round.

Samin: Yeah. I have to say we're really light on the puns in this episode.

Hrishi: No, I'm just building up the layers. We have to season the cast iron puns.

Samin: We do gotta season the pun.

Hrishi: Well, speaking of seasons, back to Halloween, Samin do you have a costume picked out for this year?

Samin: What if I go as you?

Hrishi: Oh, it would be truly terrifying to imagine. The version of me that's in your head, coming out into the world would be truly terrifying to see-

Samin: I would just have like poindexter glasses, basically you'd dress as Steve Urkel and you'd be like, "Hi, I'm Hrishi."

Samin: Maybe I should go as Sumesh Uncle.

Hrishi: Oh, that would be cute.

Samin: So cute.

Hrishi: You just need to carry an air fryer everywhere. This brings me to our final question of the night.

Samin: Is this leading us to question about vinegarette? Is this an unfortunate pun about dressing?

Hrishi: I wish. Oh my God. How did I not make that one? "What are you dressing up as?" "Caesar...salad." That'd be pretty good. Wear a Toga and a wreath of laurels and then you have just a bowl of salad.

Samin: Oh no, no, no.

Hrishi: That's a good costume, anybody out there you can use that.

Samin: It could just say "Et, tu".

Hrishi: Oh wow, that is dark, but that leads us to our final question of the episode and just a delightful one.

Samin: Maybe the entire podcast.

Hrishi: Right, maybe the entire podcast. Here we go.

Hannah: I'm Hannah and my two and a half year old son Aisa has been weirdly and consistently obsessed with cooking since he was a tiny baby. He makes his own rice, he washes asparagus. He knows how the Instapot works better than I do.

Hrishi: I'm just going to interrupt this to remind you that she said he's two and a half years old.

Samin: Yeah.

Hrishi: Okay.

Samin: This is wild.

Hannah: And he loves *Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat* both book and TV show. And a couple of days ago, I said, "Hey buddy, what do you want to dress up as for Halloween?" And he said, "Samin, Samin." So I was wondering, because I looked at a bunch of pictures of you and have watched this TV show, it's not like you have a uniform. You don't wear a chef's hat, you don't always wear an apron. If you, Samin were going to dress up as you for Halloween, how would you do it? Thanks so much. Bye.

Samin: Oh my goodness. I can't believe this came in our inbox. Also, Aisa, I love you. Amazing. Okay. Hannah and Asia my uniform is overalls.

Hrishi: Oh.

Samin: Yes.

Hrishi: That's right.

Samin: Which I'm guessing since you're two and a half, you probably have some. I wore them from two and a half on and yeah, in fact, part of my chef's detective uniform that Hrishi is trying desperately to get me to have made ...

Hrishi: The hat we have so far ...

Samin: The hat we have, which only happened because Hrishi ordered it for me and now I'm guessing the rest of it will only happen because Hrishi will also order it for me is he wants me to get a custom pair of tweed overalls made.

Hrishi: Yeah. If there are any wool tailors who can design a pair of bespoke overalls for Samin, please hit me up. I would love to engage your services.

Samin: So I would say overalls, red sneakers, that's pretty classic, a curly ponytail.

Hrishi: That sounds great. Maybe, striped T-shirt underneath.

Samin: Oh, a striped T-shirt, that's another classic. And you can just walk around with some salt, just throwing it around.

Hrishi: A tiny dish towel over your shoulder.

Samin: Oh yeah. A tiny, but very dirty, only if it's really dirty would it be accurate.

Hrishi: Oh man. Thank you so much for this question Hannah.

Samin: Please send us a picture.

Hrishi: Please.

Samin: We need, we need, we need photo evidence of this.

Hrishi: Please.

Samin: This is amazing, amazing. Oh my God, that is so cute.

Hrishi: It's the best. Well Happy Halloween everybody. Especially Aisa and if anybody else wants to dress up as Samin ...

Samin: Now you have the full guide.

Hrishi: ... now you have the key. Please send us your pictures.

Samin: Wait, now you got to tell me what my guide to dressing up as you is.

Hrishi: Nobody wants to dress up as me.

Samin: What if I want to dress up as you?

Hrishi: It's so boring. It's just a white T-shirt ...

Samin: Headphones.

Rishi: Exactly. White T-shirt, blue jeans

Samin: A goatee.

Hrishi: Goatee? Who has a goatee?

Samin: You do. Beard, what is it? A beard?

Hrishi: In this episode we learned that Samin doesn't know what a goatee is or a beard apparently. Okay, before we go, one last Halloween thought inspired partly by my dad, let's bring him back.

Sumesh: Okay, I'm on.

Hrishi: Do you know Samin that my dad used to work for a hotdog company?

Samin: I don't know that I know this.

Hrishi: Yeah, and since I have both of you here dad with your hotdog experience and with it being Halloween. Samin, have you ever thought about carving a hotdog instead of a pumpkin for a jack o'lantern?

Samin: No, please go on.

Hrishi: Well, if you could make a jack o'lantern out of a hotdog it would be a Halloweiner.

Sumesh: There's go Hrishi.

Samin: You made me turn the recording back on for this?

Hrishi: Samin, just think about it. Halloweiner.

Samin: A Hallow weiner. And your dad is just cracking up.

Hrishi: That was worth it.

Samin: Oh my gatos.

Hrishi: And that's it for this episode.

Samin: Thanks for listening.

Hrishi: We make this podcast with the help of Margaret Miller, Zach McNees, Gary Lee, and Casey Deal.

Samin: And queen Mamie Rheingold does the illustrations for our episodes.

Hrishi: Home Cooking is a proud member of Radiotopia, a collective of independent podcasts. And you can learn more about all the other Radiotopia shows at radiotopia.fm.

Samin: Let us know if you have any cooking related questions. Just record a voice memo and send it to us at alittlehomecooking@gmail.com.

Hrishi: Our website is homecooking.show

Samin: Or shrimpjenga.com.

Hrishi: Still works. You can find recipes and transcripts for all of our episodes on our website.

Samin: And you can follow Hrishi on Twitter and Instagram @hrishihirway.

Hrishi: And Samin is @ciaosamin.

Samin: Stay healthy, eat well and take care of each other.

Hrishi: We'll be back in two weeks.

Samin: Until then, I'm Samin.

Hrishi: And I'm Hrishi.

Samin: And we'll be home eating candy.