

Home Cooking Episode 7 Transcript

Samin: I am Samin Nosrat.

Hrishi: And I'm Hrishkesh Hirway.

Samin: And we're Home Cooking.

Hrishi: Remember plans? No? Well me neither. This is episode seven of our four part series where we help you figure out what to cook with what you got at home.

Samin: We're going to be joined later by our good friend Rachel Khong. She's the author of the novel *Goodbye, Vitamin*.

Hrishi: And she wrote the book *All About Eggs*.

Samin: We've also got a whole bunch of questions to answer.

Hrishi: But first Samin, what's the best thing you've had to eat all week.

Samin: I did something I've been wanting to do all pandemic. Basically I moved last year and a lot of stuff is in these boxes because I'm in this endless moving boxes unpacking situation, and so I just thought I would never be reunited with my tortilla press. And you can absolutely make tortillas without a tortilla press, but it is so much lovelier with one. And so I have been waiting to unearth mine and I finally found mine, we've been reunited. And so I took a ceremonious trip to the Mexican grocery and I bought fresh masa . And I've been eating fresh tortillas, you know, many days. And one day I ate it for all three meals. And then some days I've been having a mixture of tortillas and popcorn. There are two brands of masa harina that are incredibly corny, kind of like you. And I really love them, they're called Masienda and Almasemiera. Basically you just buy this corn flour, this masa harina, which is it's not exactly corn flour it's ground masa, and you mix it with water and you let it sit and hydrate, and then that's this tortilla sort of mixture that you then can either press in a tortilla press, or you can roll between two plastic bags with a rolling pin into a flat tortilla shape, and then just cook on a cast iron pan until they sort of puff up a little bit. And then I just then pile them up under a towel and let them steam until they're totally soft. And they're just...When you eat a tortilla that you have made freshly in the last minutes, you never want to eat a tortilla that comes from a package ever again. It is just beyond, it is so good. So I have been eating a lot of tortillas.

Hrishi: Did you say you've been eating tortillas and popcorn?

Samin: So then I was switching between tortillas for breakfast, popcorn for lunch.

Hrishi: Oh, I was imagining a tortilla-

Samin: -with popcorn on it.

Hrishi: -with popcorn inside.

Samin: No, I was just on a high corn diet.

Hrishi: Well, you're in corn-inteen.

Samin: How did I not see that one coming? How do you feel about yourself right now?

Hrishi: [Sighs]

Samin: Did you just sigh? Did you just sigh with like self pleasure?

Hrishi: No, it was shame.

Samin: We need to remove ourselves from this part of the conversation so you need to tell me what you've been eating.

Hrishi: I've just been making stuff that we've been talking about on the show.

Samin: Oh really?

Hrishi: Yeah I've made gazpacho because we talked about gazpacho and, oh, you remember, I texted you a picture of my gazpacho and you mocked it.

Samin: No I did not mock it, I just said it it could use a little water to be a little thinner.

Hrishi: It was full on mocking.

Samin: That was not mocking. I'm going to pull up the text thread.

Hrishi: I'm pulling up the texts and we will let the people decide. On the podcast she's all like I don't want to shame anyone, but-

Samin: No I do want to shame you but not about your cooking.

Hrishi: I sent you a picture, I was very proud of it, I put pieces of sourdough bread in it just as you suggested, and I was really excited about how it looked and how tasted. And what you wrote was, "Looks like it could use a splash of vinegar to thin it out"

Samin: At first I gave it a heart emoji.

Hrishi: "-or an ice cube. LOL"

Samin: No, no, no, no, no, no. Do not ignore the heart emoji, don't ignore the heart emoji. First I gave it a heart emoji and then with a cooks eye I just said, "It looks like it could use a splash of vinegar to thin it out or an ice cube or both LOL."

Samin: And then you said, "I put bread in to thicken it up".

Hrishi: Yeah.

Samin: And I just said yeah.

Hrishi: No no you didn't just say yes, you said, "Whatever, if I were at your house I'd be "accidentally" dropping ice cubes from my drink in there, but I'm not there so who cares? LOL."

Samin: And then I said U-G, U-G, U-G, U-G.

Both: U-G, U-G.

Hrishi: In case you were wondering how this goes off mike, just as mean to me.

Samin: I mean, for the record it looked beautiful. I just...Listen, gazpacho's meant to be drinkable.

Hrishi: Well, I thought it turned out really good.

Samin: It looks good.

Hrishi: So one of the things that I really liked about making gazpacho and what I like about that dish in general, and we kind of talked about this, is just how flexible it is. There's so many different ingredients that you can add as long as you have tomatoes, I don't know that I had every single thing.

Samin: Clearly you didn't have water or vinegar.

Hrishi: Oh, jeez. One thing I did have and I did put in is some jalapeno.

Samin: Delicious.

Hrishi: And I think that should bring us to our very first question.

Hallie: Hi this is Hallie.

Kenzie: And this is Kenzie, we're sisters.

Hallie: So we have received a giant bag of jalapenos from our first CSA.

Kenzie: We have absolutely no idea what to do with it. And we're probably going to get another giant bag next week.

Hallie: I have a two year old and eight months pregnant so any family friendly recipes would be much appreciated.

Samin: Family friendly?

Hrishi: Family friendly jalapeno recipes?

Samin: Yeah, totally natural.

Hrishi: Hey, Nadiya Hussain said, in our last episode, that she feeds her kids chilis so they can learn, learn about the pain.

Samin: It's true. I mean I have a lot of friends who completely just ignore the don't feed your kids spicy things thing, and I do think there is actually a lot of research. The food writer Bee Wilson wrote this amazing book called *First Bite* which is all about how children learn to eat. And it actually starts even before children are born, in utero and in it she talks about how babies are most open to trying new things between the ages of four and seven months. And so that's a really great age to sort of feed as many different flavors and tastes to kids as possible to get them to sort of create taste pathways in their brains. But even if you miss that flavor window it's not like all hope is lost. It's just that that's kind of this magical time. So maybe if your kids are between four and seven months you can just start shoving jalapenos.

Hrishi: Educational and efficient.

Samin: And the thing about spiciness is that spiciness isn't a flavor, spiciness is actually pain on your tongue. And then we also have threshold, it's about our pain threshold, it has nothing to do with flavor. So maybe you guys just got to eat a little bit of jalapeno everyday.

Hrishi: Just work your way up -

Samin: Keep getting used to it.

Hrishi: You just gotta start snacking on 16 jalapenos a day.

Samin: Yeah, totally. That's a really efficient way to use them up. One awesome way to use up a lot of jalapenos that seems somewhat kid friendly and also completely impractical is to make jalapeno poppers. And that's the only sort of even remotely family friendly version that I could possibly think of because it involves scraping out all of the inside ribs and seeds and filling them instead with delicious melty cheese and then breading the outside and deep frying it, which all seem kid friendly kind of things. And still I have a hard time imagining children eating this and that just seems like a huge project that probably as a mother of small

children and expecting other children and with impending CSA boxes you're probably not going to do.

Hrishi: Yeah, it seems very hard.

Samin: Yeah, I don't think that this is really something you're going to be doing.

Hrishi: I mean this is very basic, but it was a revelation to me when I first encountered it, when I first moved to Los Angeles. But I remember coming here and going to a Oaxacan diner and having for the very first time huevos ala Mexicana. It's just scrambled eggs with sauteed onions, jalapenos and tomatoes, and it is the best thing and I would order that dish all the time. And nowadays I probably make that more than anything else here at home.

Samin: Would it be delicious on a homemade tortilla?

Hrishi: Oh, it would be amazing, I wish I had homemade tortillas to eat it with. But really all you need are just a few ingredients. You saute some onions, you add some minced jalapenos and diced tomatoes, and you scramble in some eggs with some salt and a little bit of pepper, and that's it. It's delicious.

Samin: Well that sounds great but I have to say it doesn't really sound like it's addressing the problem of a lot of jalapenos with more coming. It sounds like this uses a quarter of a jalapeno.

Hrishi: Well this is the nice thing about it is you can scale it up to your needs of spiciness/need to get rid of this jalapeno-ness.

Samin: So you use 29 in one dish. No, this is not helping.

Hrishi: You could get through about one jalapeno with this, maybe half for every three eggs. You just have to commit to making it a lot.

Samin: I will make huevos ala Mexicana because it sounds delicious and simple.

Hrishi: Exactly, you make some beans on the side and make a whole thing out of it. You could put some of your jalapenos in your beans too.

Samin: You can put some jalapenos in your beans, like one or two. I'm talking mega use versions here.

Hrishi: If a recipe is only going to use 50% of a jalapeno I feel like we should call it halfapeno.

Samin: I would agree with that.

Hrishi: That should be standard.

Samin: I'm just not even going to give you a laugh right now.

Hrishi: I don't need the laugh, I got better than the laugh, I got your endorsement. Wait until I come up with my book Halfapeno.

Samin: Halfapeno.

Hrishi: -and on the front, just in big letters, bigger than the title, it's going to say "I agree with that."- Samin Nosrat, James Beard award winning chef.

Samin: And it'll be all recipes with halfapeno in it.

Hrishi: Exactly.

Samin: I love it.

Samin: So what I think you can do with all your jalapenos-

Hrishi: Allapenos.

Samin: -all your penos, is make some hot sauce. I think you can make your own homemade hot sauce which is actually incredibly easy and really kind of fun to make and very gratifying. So it's kind of like making your own Tabasco sauce. And this is not so different than many other versions of fermentation that I have talked about on this very podcast, but it's quite simple. And I will link to some actual recipes online, but the method is quite straightforward. So you clean your chilies. I think it's probably best to remove the stems. Depending on how hot you want the sauce to be you can decide to remove the seeds or not, or some of the seeds or not. You put them all into a big jar. I enjoy some garlic in my hot sauce so you can add a couple, some garlic cloves. You're going to want some salt in there, you're going to want a little bit of sugar in there. And this is where your fun creativity comes in. So if you enjoy Mexican flavors, you can add some Mexicanish spices or you could go other directions. Or you could make kind of a blank slate hot sauce, and just keep it simple, or you could make a gingery lemon grassy one or whatever. And then you basically just keep it on the counter and let it ferment. You want to make sure that everything is submerged in the water and at this point it's summertime so the temperature is pretty warm, so it won't take that many days probably five to seven days. Usually the peppers will start floating to the top and you might see a little bit of fizzes happening. And to me, the brine tastes kind of nice at that point. Then I take all the chilies and the solids out, put them in the blender, and puree them with a small amount, of the liquid, of the brine. Whatever amount of brine is appropriate to get the thickness, thinness, of the hot sauce that I want, right? And then you can use the rest, the rest of that brine is then salty and very spicy, and you can use that as a condiment, if you want, or a base for vinaigrettes. And then you have hot sauce, and you can put

that in jars and keep that in the fridge, and you got a years' supply of hot sauce. And then if it's not tasting exactly right, you can definitely tinker with it after you've fermented it. You can add a little bit of your own vinegar and/or lime juice or lemon juice or whatever to get it just right. But that first fermentation definitely is a nice part of the process, and it gets a certain tang that's really delicious and special.

Hrishi: Hallie and Kenzie, I think this sounds like a great idea. You should make your own hot sauce. And if it goes well, that would make such a great gift, and so if you're getting jalapenos week after week, maybe you could start making them and bottling them and then giving them away.

Samin: Oh my God, maybe you can send us a jar.

Hrishi: Okay, thanks for the question! Our next question comes from Susan.

Susan: Whenever I make pesto, it comes out bitter and I don't know if it's the quality of my olive oil, which isn't the best, but it's not the worst, and I don't know if it is the fact that I don't use a mortar and pestle and I do it in a food processor. I'm just not sure, and I need just some guidance to make my pesto better. As an Italian-American, it's kind of embarrassing that I haven't gotten my pesto in order. So, I would really appreciate it. Take care. Bye.

Samin: You know what this sounds like?

Hrishi: What does it sound like? Chef Detective.

Samin: My name is Samin Nosrat, and this is Chef Detective.

Hrishi: Well, what do you think, detective? What do you detect in Susan's pesto problems?

Samin: Well, I think we really have to approach this scientifically. Okay, Susan. There are a bunch of elements that we need to address.

Hrishi: So, in other words, it's elementary, dear Samin.

Samin: Oh, no, my dear Watson. So, the potential culprits of bitterness. Let's look at them. Because you didn't tell me, I'm going to assume you're making your pesto with basil, pine nuts, Parmesan cheese, olive oil, salt, and garlic. And then, since you told me you're using a food processor, that part I know. So, the potential culprits of bitterness can be the food processor -

Hrishi: Too much rejection in the food processor's life early on? That can cause bitterness.

Samin: Yeah, serious bitterness. And, I mean, you're talking to the queen.

Hrishi: Okay, where does your investigation start?

Samin: We're going to take for granted the basil's sweet.

Hrishi: Okay.

Samin: It could totally be the pine nuts, and if you're using other nuts, it could totally be those other nuts. I did find recently a bunch of rancid pine nuts in my pantry, which was a super disappointing thing to realize because they're very expensive.

Hrishi: How do you keep them from going rancid?

Samin: Time.

Hrishi: You just have to use them in time. It's not like if you were to toast them, they would last longer or anything like that.

Samin: No, they would just be toasted and rancid.

Hrishi: Okay. Got it.

Samin: You could try freezing them to extend their life, and I used to be a person who kept my nuts in the freezer, and I think if you live somewhere that's very, very hot and humid, that would maybe be a helpful way to extend the life of many of your ingredients, but I don't live somewhere very hot and humid, and also I have a very tiny freezer, so that's just not an option for me.

Hrishi: So, the solution would be, just make sure you're using fresh pine nuts.

Samin: Yeah. I would say taste your pine nuts, and if you're going to use other nuts, like walnuts, definitely taste them beforehand. A little cheat if you want to ensure sweetness is to perhaps use a sweeter nut, like I find pecans to be incredibly fatty and very, very sweet. So, that's a way to get some sweetness, work some sweetness in.

Hrishi: And have you done that? Have you made pesto with pecans?

Samin: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I mean, I wouldn't call it traditional Italian basil pesto, but there's a really delicious kale pesto recipe in Joshua McFadden's book called Six Seasons, and I think his recipe is made with kale with walnuts and Parmesan, but COVID times call for extraordinary measures, so I'm out here using pecans, and it's really delicious. It's been a really nice thing that I love spreading on toast with a fried egg for breakfast, or maybe a tortilla. And so, that's where you start diverging from the traditional Italian version of pesto, but also no less worthy, no less delicious. But to go back to the pine nuts, definitely, I think, making sure that

your pine nuts are not rancid is really, really important. Making sure that your pine nuts aren't even bitter. I mean, they don't even necessarily have to be rancid, but maybe the nuts are just bitter, and that might be the source of the bitterness itself.

Hrishi: You think that's the most likely source?

Samin: I think the most likely source is the olive oil, and I think the easiest way to tell is just by tasting it raw..

Hrishi: Just have a little bread and olive oil and see how that is?

Samin: I think even just dip your finger in it and taste it, and really do it thoughtfully, and be really honest with yourself about it. And if it's a question of cost I believe on our resources page, I've linked to several olive oils that are not super-duper expensive. I mean, one of my favorite everyday ones is from a place called Séka Hills. It's a Native American reservation here in the Bay Area that produces really great extra virgin olive oil. Also, another really affordable one is the organic olive oil that's the Costco Kirkland brand, Kirkland Signature, the organic Italian one. That one regularly tests pretty highly on the blind tests from the international olive oil commissions if extra virgin is just simply outside your price point, what you can do is use some portion of the oil that you have and cut it with some other oil. Either a pure olive oil or even a canola oil or a grapeseed oil or some very clean-tasting, neutral oil that will have less of that very strong, maybe grassy or bitter olive oil-y taste that might be what's making your sauce bitter. And so, again, maybe that's not the perfect answer to a perfectly Italian grassy, fresh olive oil, but it probably will solve the problem of this particular bottle of olive oil bringing this bitterness to your pesto.

Hrishi: Got it.

Samin: I mean, what's curious about this, to me, is that maybe it's the food processor.

Hrishi: How so?

Samin: So, a food processor is powered by a motor which is producing heat while it's running, and so if you run the machine for a very, very long time, there is a possibility that, in a way, you're cooking your pesto.

Hrishi: Right.

Samin: I would guess that the culprit is your olive oil, and if it's not your olive oil when it's completely raw then it could be the combination of some heat from the food processor plus the olive oil.

Hrishi: Susan, I hope that helps.

Samin: I hope this helps, and let us know. This one, I'm curious. I'm always curious if we solve your problem.

Hrishi: Yeah. Send us a follow-up.

Samin: Yeah. Don't send us the pesto.

Hrishi: Well, Susan was talking about a dish from her Italian heritage. Here's a question from Sophia about an ingredient from her Chinese heritage.

Sophia: My question is about a large jar of dried goji berries that my lovely Chinese mother gifted me a few years ago. I know that goji berries are supposed to be very nutritious and are also pretty expensive, so you don't want to waste them, but I have no idea what to do with them. I've tried putting them in tea a couple times, and I found that pretty underwhelming, and I'd love to figure out a way to cook with them, if possible. If you guys have any thoughts, I would love to hear them. Thank you so much.

Hrishi: What do you think?

Samin: Okay. To be totally transparent, the only time I have ever my own self cooked with a goji berry was when my acupuncturist gave them to me in a mixture of herbs that I was supposed to put in chicken stock to fortify my chi, and so that's literally the only thing I've ever done with them and I was like, "Well, you can put them in your chicken stock to fortify your chi.". How did the chicken stock turn out?

Samin: I mean, the chicken stock was great, and I mean, I also, I think, have been very clear about on this podcast, love chicken stock. I drink it, I eat it. I use it for many rices and congees and soups and other uses. So, when that was prescribed to me by my acupuncturist, it was not a problem. You know what I mean? I was like, "Oh, cool." Like, "This is totally something I can do." And I did not feel that the mixture of herbs and goji berries and other things really affected the flavor of the stock at all, so to me, I was like, "Okay, cool. This is making my chi better. I'm cool with that."

Hrishi: Yeah, but you didn't actually taste the difference.

Samin: Mm-mm (negative). So, maybe it's what Sophia referred to as underwhelming. So, if you're after the, let's say, taste effects, I'm not sure that that putting it in your stock is going to get you whelm, but it may make you well. Oh, no, I'm turning into you.

Hrishi: You don't even need me here.

Samin: No.

Hrishi: You might be shocked to discover that my mind turned to cookies.

Samin: Shocking.

Hrishi: But I was thinking about a recipe that I have been playing with from a friend of the podcast, former guest Stella Parks' cookbook, *BraveTart*.

Samin: Tell us more.

Hrishi: She has an oatmeal cookie that's really, really good, and I depart from it in a few different ways, and it still turns out great. And she even has a whole bunch of different suggestions at the end for variations that you can do. But the recipe in the book is a triple oatmeal cranberry cookie, and she says she likes it with cranberries instead of the traditional raisins because of the brighter, sharper flavor that the cranberry gives, and I thought that could work with the goji berry, maybe, too.

Samin: Yeah, because I think goji berries are even more tangy.

Hrishi: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Goji berries, to me, have a tiny bit of a Cap'n Crunch Berry flavor to them, which might not work in the combination, but I think a goji berry in an oatmeal cookie would be really interesting. I would want to try it.

Samin: I think I could support that. Oh! I have an idea. I have a great idea. Okay, because the goji berry is quite tart, and so it would be really nice to balance it with, like Hrishi is saying, in a rather sweet recipe. There is this recipe that I really, really love that was written by one of my favorite cookbook writers, Alice Madrich. She's like a baking cookbook grand dom cookbook writer. But she wrote this book that I adore. I'm looking at it right now. It's above me. It's called, *Pure Dessert*. And in that book, there is this recipe for a dried fruit and nut cake that I love so much. Basically, you can use any combination of dried fruits and nuts. They're very, very, very barely bound together by a mixture of like a little bit of flour, baking soda, baking powder, Brown sugar, and egg. So it's almost all dried fruits and nuts. It's very, very dense. You usually like slice it in really thin slices. It's the kind of thing you would serve on a cheese platter.

Hrishi: Oh yeah! It looks like those bougie crackers that they have at Whole Foods.

Samin: It's kind of like those bougie crackers. Yeah, exactly. It's not crackery though. It's soft, it's a really wonderful gift. It's actually something I have often made for the holidays and I send out these loaves. It keeps really well. Replacing some other amount of the dried fruit in here with goji berry would not be a bad idea. Right

now I'm looking at the recipe and it says one cup dried apricot, nectarine, prune, peaches, or cherries. I think you could probably replace at least half of that with goji berry. Then, you also have one cup of dry date or fig you could probably even do more than half a cup of goji berry. It would be so good and it would be so beautiful. Because then when you slice it, you get these beautiful, like studded red jewels. Ah, I think this is the perfect use.

Hrishi: Awesome.

Samin: We'll link to this in the resources.

Hrishi: While we're in a sort of, while we're in a granola mood, I'm going to play you this question from Simone.

Simone: I'm looking for advice on trail snacks. Since COVID, my boyfriend and I have been going on big hikes and we even hope to plan a backpacking trip soon. Something I've learned though, is that after like two hours on a hike, my boyfriend starts getting really, really hangry. His solution is to eat Power Bars, but I have yet to enjoy a Power Bar that isn't basically pure chocolate and I'm not trying to eat pure candy. Another thing that's been good is fruit and nut butters, but that's been getting old and they also explode in my bag. We're also okay just shoveling roasted nuts in our mouth, but it seems like a missed opportunity to eat something really yummy. Please let me know if you have any delicious Power Bar, protein heavy cookies, or just trail mix advice. Thanks.

Hrishi: All I heard in that was heavy cookies and I want whatever that is.

Samin: This does seem very up your alley. What you got?

Hrishi: This may shock you, but one thing that came to mind for me was cookies. I think cookie is a little generous for this. This is a recipe that Lindsey used to make. She called these "Energy Cookies". I argued that they weren't really cookies because they tasted too healthy to me. But they were good. I mean, like for a healthy thing, they were good. So, Lindsay's energy cookies were made with a bunch of different seeds. The protein comes from a mix of sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, and flax seeds. Those all get combined with some flour and some raisins and a little bit of chocolate chips. So, there's a nod towards a cookie, but really it's just a bunch of seeds.

Samin: It's seeds that wish they were a cookie.

Hrishi: Yeah, exactly. The way that they come out, they're not even like discs like a cookie. They're more like round spheres.

Samin: That sounds like something you would really be stoked to eat on a trail.

Hrishi: Yeah, not stoked if you're having a crazy dessert craving at like midnight while watching a movie.

Samin No, Couch cookie, no, trail cookie, yes. Hundred percent.

Hrishi: Totally different standards.

Samin: A hundred percent. The thought I had was what if you replaced an ingredient in a granola type dish with something that's higher protein. So there is this cereal that this bakery restaurant that I really love called Honey and Co in London makes called Ashura. They make this sort of puffed delicious cereal that I'm obsessed with, that I wrote a column about. So the recipe is in The Times and we can put a link to it in the episode notes. It's made similarly to granola. But, instead of oats, it's made with puffed wheat or other puffed grains. Unlike granola, you kind of heat up honey and stuff and then you mix it with like baking soda so it puffs up and then you pour that over and then you bake everything. It kind of turns into like a little bit of a... I don't know how to explain it, like a brittle situation in the oven. It's this wonderful texture. It's addictive. And the spices in there...there's a spice called malib that you could leave out if you can't get your hands on it. It's so good.

Hrishi: I'm looking at the recipe right now.

Samin: And this version has pumpkin seeds in it and Sesame seeds and almonds. What if instead of puffed wheat you used puffed quinoa, which is a much higher source of protein. Also, I have a bag of puffed quinoa downstairs that I put on top of my yogurt all the time and it's so crispy, delicious. I love it. I get it from place called Edison Grainery. So this, if you made it with quinoa, it would be getting more into like brittle territory rather than like big cereal territory. I think it would be super fun to eat. Super tasty. You might have to tinker with the recipe a couple of times. You might need to make a little bit more of the oil, honey, sugar mixture to coat everything so you could turn it into like a bar situation rather than a cereal. That's basically the difference between granola and granola bars? It's what gets them to stick together. But I think you could make yourself quinoa granola bars. You could also, much like Lindsay's recipe, pump it full of nuts and seeds. You could put chia things in there and Flaxie things in there and whatever. If you wanted to like pump a little bit of protein powder or whey protein or whatever. Whatever other kinds of like health, food, hippie dippy craps you wanted to put in there, you can put in there. You could do all of that too.

Hrishi: Awesome.

Samin: You know, and then just cover it in the brown sugar and honey. Nobody needs to know.

Hrishi: That sounds great.

Samin: I think that would be super, super, super delicious.

Hrishi: Okay we're going to take a quick break and when we come back we're going to speak to Rachel Khong.

Hrishi: Okay now we are going to talk to our friend Rachel Khong. She's a wonderful writer and food is a big part of her work.

Samin: Yeah and in addition to her novel, *Goodbye Vitamin* she is also the founder of The Ruby a coworking space for women and non-binary people and the former Executive Editor of the food magazine *The Lucky Peach*.

Hrishi: Separately we both happen to have known her for many years.

Samin: I loved when we figured that out.

Hrishi: Yeah. Hi Rachel

Samin: We love you.

Rachel: I love both of you.

Samin: We're so glad you could join us today on this fine, foggy Bay Area day.

Rachel: I'm really busy, so I am really glad that I could squeeze you both in.

Samin: Wait. I heard a rumor you're on a rice journey.

Rachel: Oh. It's not a rumor, it's reality. A couple days ago, a friend and I decided to test out four different rice cooking methods.

Samin: Why?

Hrishi: Why?

Rachel: So, I don't own a rice cooker, but I do have a donabe pot and a microwave. I often just cook rice on the stove top. My friend Natalie has this Tatung steamer.

Samin: What's that?

Rachel: It's this Taiwanese steamer that reheats food but you can also cook rice in it by steaming. We compared the donabe pot to the microwave to the Tatung steamer to a regular pot on the stove.

Samin: Wait. You cooked rice four ways and none of them was in a rice cooker?

Rachel: I just don't have one.

Samin: That's amazing.

Hrishi: Wow. We actually got a question the other day from someone named Marta, who wrote, "My husband and I just bought our first house and have decided to retire the very scratched, small rice cooker we bought over a decade ago in college. We make jasmine and sushi rice, but my husband is Bangladeshi, so good, fluffy, Basmati is most important. The fancy rice cookers I've looked at seem to specialize in short grain since they are from Japan. What is a good rice cooker for Basmati rice that won't screw up the occasional sushi rice? The subject line was: "Rice Cooker for All the Rices." You might be uniquely unqualified to answer this, though, Rachel, having no rice cooker at all.

Samin: Having no rice cooker.

Rachel: Yeah, I mean feel like this person should perhaps learn to cook rice in a pot or this person's husband, rather, should learn to cook rice just like in a pot. I think there are really fancy Asian rice cookers that you can find at the Chinese or Korean market that have all of these different settings, long-grain, short-grain, porridge, whatever rice you desire can be cooked in one of these magic machines.

Hrishi: But yeah I am going to put in a vote for stove top rice cooking.

Rachel: I love cooking on the stove too, and I feel like that's the way to do it if you have a wide interest in rices of all kinds.

Hrishi: Mine really came from a lot of rice cooker failures. The problem is when I was growing up, my mom made rice every day with a rice cooker, but there were four people to cook rice for.

Rachel: Right.

Hrishi: But here at home, when there's just two of us, making a small amount of rice, for a couple meals, I would always end up burning it at the bottom of the rice cooker.

Samin: What kind of rice cooker did you have?

Hrishi: I don't know. I didn't even buy it. My parents bought it for me as a housewarming present.

Samin: Ah-ha. Interesting.

Hrishi: It's not like a teeny tiny one made for teeny tiny servings, so instead we do the teeny tiny amount in a little saucepan on the stove. No burnt rice.

Rachel: I don't think rice cookers are designed for maybe one or two people. It's more of a five cup situation for a family that eats rice a lot, which my family did growing up.

Samin: Wow. This conversation has gone full rice cooker and oh, my gosh. We come from three different rice cultures.

Hrishi: And what's your rice cooker situation?

Samin: Currently, I have a Zojirushi, one of the fancy ones that has all the different modes.

Hrishi: It's full name is Zojirushikesh.

Samin: Correct. He's my rice-casting partner co-host? I love him very much. After I visited Japan and I realized people in Japan like the high-tech fancy ones because it keeps rice hot 24/7 and you can just wake up in the morning and have hot rice for breakfast, I was like, "Got to get one of these." I also inherited mine from a friend. I don't think I've ever bought a fancy appliance. But I do use it all the time, and I love that it keeps rice hot for two or three days. It's really a very useful thing, and it has ... You can make brown rice, short-grain, long-grain, all that kinds of stuff. But it doesn't make the Basmati as nice as when my mom makes it. My mom always made rice by hand, except for a kind of Persian rice called kateh, which sometimes we would use a rice cooker for. My aunt has a specific kateh rice cooker, which you can buy at Iranian groceries.

Hrishi: Wait, Rachel, in your non-rice cooker exploration, what gave you the best results?

Rachel: We had a standard rice that we were using. We were using a short-grain Japanese rice. Each of us cooked two rices, so my friend Natalie cooked the stove top and the steamer rice, and I cooked the rice in a donabe and in the microwave, and we tasted them all blind. We had labeled them on the bottom and then scrambled them and numbered them. I printed out this rice rubric with aroma, texture, and taste. In terms of total point amounts, I think the order was steamer was the winner, and then in ranked choice voting, donabe was the winner.

Samin: Oh, my God. You are busy.

Rachel: I am. Yes. Surprisingly, microwave rice did better than I expected. I thought it would be very clear to every one which one had been microwaved, but it's a totally acceptable way to cook rice, it turns out. Maybe if you just want to cook something in the microwave for fun, microwave rice is a great activity.

Hrishi: For fun. God, what we will accept as fun these days.

Rachel: This is truly the most fun I've had in a very long time.

Samin: Wait. Can you describe what a donabe is and how you cook in it?

Rachel: Yeah. I actually just got a donabe for myself and it is a Japanese clay pot, each of them is made by hand, or at least the one that I got was made by hand. It's supposed to, I think, heat very evenly and retain temperature and flavor. I've only really had it for a week and a half, so-

Samin: Oh. So the rice thing was inspired by the acquisition of the donabe?

Rachel: It was a bit, yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Samin: Okay

Hrishi: For your rubric, which I suggest you rename rubrice-

Rachel: No

Samin: Rubrice! Oh, no!

Hrishi: Rachel, I wanted to ask you about your book, "Goodbye Vitamin" and the way you wrote about food in that. I found it so lovely. It's not a book that is primarily about food, in terms of its premise, I guess. But I think in the actual reality of the story, it is about food in this way that feels very real, as a way of getting through the days. I really loved that.

Rachel: Thanks. I haven't really had to talk about the book in a long time because it came out a couple years ago, but I've been thinking that it is weirdly relevant to our situation now, I think. It's a book about a woman who goes home when she's at her wit's end and is feeling very lost and adrift, and she decides to spend a year at home with her parents. Really, there's just not much to do at home. She got to go to restaurants and stuff, but it's not so dissimilar, I think, from life right now and having to shelter in place. So I really wanted, in that book, to kind of depict the really mundane aspects of life. I was really interested in the question of, what gets included in a story and what makes up a life, even. As a person who thinks a lot about food, it seemed really natural to me to want to include it, and to include the cooking adventures and failures that this character, Ruth has, and also the weird snacks that she eats. At one point, she and a friend are just eating peanuts and ranch dressing because it kind of tastes like corn nuts.

Samin: I would totally eat that.

Rachel: It's really just about food as being a kind of central part of life in a lot of ways. It's what we all have to do. It's often a thing that can be a highlight of a day when there's not much else to your days.

Hrishi: Yeah.

Samin: That's so beautiful. My favorite memory from your book is the chocolate cake. Can you tell us about the chocolate cake?

Rachel: In the book, and actually in my real life, I have also done this. The character makes a chocolate cake entirely in the microwave.

Samin: Another fun thing you can do in the microwave.

Hrishi: She really does do it for fun. It's like a clickbait link that she gets sent over Facebook, right, and then she just ... She does it out of ... It seems like almost out of boredom one day. Like you said, to create the highlight for herself, out of food.

Rachel: Exactly. It actually was an email that I received from my mom about 10 years ago. I think the subject line was "Fwd:Fwd:Fwd: The most dangerous cake in the world." The reason it's the most dangerous cake is that you can basically make it in a mug in your microwave in two minutes and now you're only a few minutes away from chocolate cake any time of the day or night. It's one egg, some cocoa powder, some flour, sugar, little bit of oil, probably some other stuff I'm forgetting, and then you just nuke it for two minutes. It's kind of like ... You know those molten chocolate cakes you get at Cheesecake Factory?

Hrishi: Do I know them? Do I know them?

Rachel: You know, if you time it just right, it can be perfectly runny in the middle. It's not obviously the best cake in the world. It has a bit of that steamed, microwave flavor, but in a pinch it really does-

Samin: Totally passable. I would totally ... There are times when you're so desperate - I mean when I am so desperate for a chocolatey treat or a dessert thing in the middle of the night. I have my chocolate chip and banana cookie, which is a handful of chocolate chips and banana chips. I have my chocolate chip peanut butter cookie, which is a handful of chocolate chips and a spoonful of peanut butter.

Hrishi: I've done that one.

Samin: This is a real step up. The only problem is I don't have a microwave, but I would get one.

Hrishi: You have to get one for this and for your rice.

Samin: And for my rice. Wait, when you talked to you, when we were messaging back and forth with you, Rachel, a few weeks ago, you were in a pickle mode.

Rachel: Yes.

Samin: Are you still in pickle mode?

Rachel: I'm always in pickle mode.

Samin: What are you pickling these days?

Rachel: Kimchi is a regular thing that I just have in the fridge. I've been experimenting with pickled mustard greens and long beans, like the kinds you get in Chinese noodle soups.

Samin: Yum.

Rachel: It's nice to just have something that exists in your fridge and can immediately be used.

Hrishi: I have a question that I want to play, this comes from Luca.

Luca: I work for a pickle company, and as you can imagine, I get a ton of pickle brine. I've made about a million different vinaigrettes to put on different things, and I'm a little tired of it. I was wondering if you had any other fun ideas for things to do when you have a lot of pickle brine left over.

Hrishi: Rachel, you have written a book called "All About Eggs" that is literally all about eggs, and I was wondering, with your pickling experience and your eggs-perience...

Samin: Oh, no.

Rachel: Oh, no.

Hrishi: That was just right there.

Rachel: It's my fault for writing the book, giving you that excellent segue.

Hrishi: Would you recommend to Luca pickling eggs? Have you ever done that?

Rachel: I have, and I would recommend it. Especially with some beets and vinegar, it looks so cool when you pickle an egg in beets. It's pink, and then with time it sort of seeps all the way through the white, so it'll be this entirely pink egg. I like

putting pickled eggs on any kind of salad or grain situation or just kind of snacking on them.

Samin: That sounds really good. That sounds like a great idea.

Rachel: I would also use it for Bloody Marys and stuff, or drink it straight because pickle brine is delicious.

Samin: Yeah. Another thing you can do I've seen a lot of recipes for fried chicken that's been brined in pickle brine.

Rachel: Ooh.

Samin: Or you can probably do it with other meats too, but I think it would be really nice with chicken thighs that you brine overnight in pickle brine and then deep fry, and then you eat some delicious pickles on that fried chicken sandwich. That sounds really nice. All of the uses Rachel said are great. There is this really awesome, amazing, wonderful place in Berkeley called Cultured Pickles. They are a mom 'n pop pickle shop. They ferment everything, and they use a lot of the brines for all sorts of different things. They cook in the brines, they use them for vinaigrette. Sometimes if I'm feeling kind of crazy, I buy those gut shots, which are just the sauerkraut brine. It's like the probiotic shot of the liquid from cultured cabbage, and you just drink the salty cabbage water, which just feels somehow ... Maybe it's completely a placebo, but feels like it's good for you.

Rachel: I haven't had a cup of coffee since this pandemic started, and I'm normally a daily coffee drinker. I stopped just because I was feeling too anxious about the world, and actually a shot of vinegar in the afternoon sometimes helps out with that.

Samin: That's so cool.

Hrishi: Wow. I've been doing the cheat of re-pickling because I got a jar of pickled carrots. Have you ever had those Carriots of Fire from Pacific Pickle Works?

Samin: Absolutely not, but of course you bought something called Carriots of Fire.

Hrishi: I love them so much and I can never get enough of them. Sometimes they're sold out. Last time when I ran out, I just tried to be very conservative with the pickle juice, and then I just cut up more carrots and re-pickled them in there.

Samin: Oh, that's awesome.

Hrishi: It's not quite as good as the real thing, but it's getting me through it.

Samin: No. It's getting you through. I love that. It might be helpful if you heat it up the second time and then dump it over.

Hrishi: Heat up the brine?

Samin: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Hrishi: Oh. Well now I want to try and make these pretty pink pickled eggs with the beets.

Samin: Oh, another way to make them really pretty if you don't want to go the beet route is you could put some turmeric root or powdered turmeric in the brine. You would color them golden instead of coloring them pink.

Rachel: For Instagram.

Samin: For Instagram. Yeah.

Hrishi: Rachel, thank you so much for talking to us. It's so nice to hear your voice and please don't be a stranger.

Rachel: Oh!

Samin: Oh, no. You've been planning that this whole time. I can just see the terrible grin on your face.

Hrishi: No, it just happened.

Samin: No.

Hrishi: Sometimes it just happens.

Rachel: God. That one was much sneakier.

Samin: Don't be a stranger. Rachel, we love you. We can't wait to read whatever book you're fermenting right now.

Rachel: Thank you.

Hrishi: Go read Rachel's book, *Goodbye Vitamin* it's fantastic.

Samin: And follow her on social media, her twitter is @rachelkhong

Hrishi: And her instagram is @rrrrrrrachelkhong that's Rachel with seven r's and then -achelkhong.

Samin: That's where you're gonna find the rubric.

Hrishi: Okay. Samin, to wrap things up, we have a question from Abby.

Abby: My name is Abby and I am in a sweet potato predicament. I was meal prepping for a very large salad for about 13 people and severely overestimated the amount

of sweet potatoes that I would need, and have now found myself with about eight pounds of peeled and baked sweet potatoes that I have no idea what to do with. Any help would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Samin: Okay, eight pounds, I'm trying to imagine. That's like eight big sweet potatoes.

Hrishi: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Samin: Yeah, okay. So I think what you got to do is divide and conquer. I would say definitely some hash, definitely.

Hrishi: Get high. That'll re-approach this-

Samin: And then just come back in middle of the night and stuff your face. That'll take care of three of them. That's so dumb.

Hrishi: And then with the other five.

Samin: ... with the other five. And then I also think...

Hrishi: Wait, wait, I totally derailed. Wait, well, do you actually have sweet potato hash recipe?

Samin: Yeah. So to make hash, basically, the thing with potatoes or sweet potatoes for any sort of hash or...

Hrishi: Home fries.

Samin: Home fries, yes. Thank you. Okay. So one of my hugest pet peeves in the entire universe, is when potatoes, things like home fries, are not cooked through all the way. And so you get your beautiful plate of breakfast foods and you take a bite of potato and it's crunchy in the middle. It's just so upsetting to me, so deeply upsetting to the core of my being.

Hrishi: Your crunchy, uncooked core.

Samin: To the crunchy, uncooked core. And it's so easy to prevent. And the way to prevent that is to precook them, to boil them, to par cook them before you go to crisp them. And so you have already done that. So you're on your way. So now all you have to do is do the crisping. You already made them soft. Now all you have to do is make them crispy. So you're halfway to hash. And so all you have to do now is, you've already peeled them, all have to do is cut them into pieces. And you get to fry them up in your cast iron pan with some healthy amount of fat, whatever fat you like and turn them into delicious crispy potatoes that then you can put a poached egg.

Hrishi: Sweet potato home fries.

Samin: Yeah, exactly. And so what I might do at this point is start an onion that I have diced up in some oil or fat of whatever kind. I have duck fat in my fridge. I might use that. I have butter, I might use that. I have coconut oil, which I think pairs particularly deliciously with sweet potatoes. So I might use that. Get that going. Cook the onions until they're starting to brown. Add the sweet potatoes. And then I would let them sit and not move them because you want them to start browning and not move them too much and really form that like crust. Let the starches sort of form the crust before you turn them. And then turn them, turn them, turn them until you got that crust on all the sides. And that's how you make hash. It does take a while, it'll probably take upwards of 20 minutes. And it does take more fat than some people are comfortable with to really get it done properly. And then you can drain all the excess fat off, at the end. And serve it with a poached egg and hot sauce, maybe some of your jalapeno hot sauce that you made earlier, and a big pile of herbs or a salad or whatever. So that's the way I think you could use up probably more than you think, at least three or four of them. Another way I like to cook sweet potatoes is toss them with some oil or coconut oil and cook them at a really high temperature, so maybe 450 degrees. Spread them out on a single layer on a sheet pan on a baking sheet and just roast them until they're brown. And you might have to sort of move them around with a metal spatula to make sure. Or flip them or turn them, so that they're browning on all the sides, but you just want to crisp them up. It's kind of like oven fries. So that's a version you could use up probably half of them easily.

Hrishi: That sounds great.

Samin: Yeah, those are so good. I eat those with hot sauce and big dollops of Greek yogurt all the time. That's a dinner I eat often is just roasted sweet potatoes with yogurt and hot sauce. I eat that, at least once a week.

Hrishi: I was just starting to fantasize about all my favorite restaurant French fry dips that I haven't had.

Samin: Oh, yeah, the French fry dips. I mean, that's delicious.

Hrishi: The garlic aioli and the blue cheese and all these incredible... All right.

Samin: You miss sauce.

Hrishi: Yeah, I did.

Samin: You can make it yourself.

Hrishi: Yeah.

Samin: It's not the same because you have to wash the dishes. And then the other way I think you can use up quite a lot is to make shepherd's pie. And so you could make a veggie shepherd's pie with peas. And right now, it's summertime, so you can make a delicious summery one with corn and you could start with onions and carrots and, there's peppers. You could just make a yummy sort of veggie stew, if you wanted to work a little bit of-

Hrishi: I've never had a good shepherd's pie.

Samin: You've never had it?

Hrishi: I've never had a good shepherd's pie. The first and last time I ever had shepherd's pie was in my school cafeteria. And that might explain-

Samin: Oh, yeah, so you have an aversion to it now?

Hrishi: Yeah. I was like, "What's this?" And I tried it. I was like, "This is terrible." It tastes like the way the cafeteria smells. Half laundry, half cafeteria and then I just thought shepherd's pie is bad.

Samin: I think good shepherds pie is great. Good shepherd's pie is delicious. And the other thing I love about it is, if you're feeling like, "Ooh, I don't want to be eating that right now, it's middle of summer." It's the perfect thing to sort of get ready and then put in the freezer and then you have a ready meal to go straight in the oven at a later date. So if you're a vegetarian, you can make a veggie base or you can go the Hrishi route and use some sort of veggie based meat. Or if you're not vegetarian, you can use any sort of ground meat, whether it's chicken or turkey or beef or lamb. And traditionally there's peas is in there too. And then you just make a sort of mashed potato or in this case, mashed sweet potato topping, that you can, if you're a real fancy, pipe on top or just spoon on top. And then you bake that at approximately 400 degrees until it's kind of beautiful and brown and bubbly on top. And then serve that for dinner. So that'll use up several. Another way to use up a bunch of them is to make some dog food, which I don't think is a bad way to use them up at all.

Hrishi: That's true. My friend, Umeth for my birthday, made Watson a whole thing of sweet potato dog biscuits. And they were so cute and they all said, "Watson," on them.

Samin: Oh, that's really cute.

Hrishi: Are there any sweet potato desserts?

Samin: Yeah, of course, sweet potato pie. Hello? But the other thing that comes immediately to mind for me, which is a recipe I've been wanting to try for over a year, is a sweet potato bebinca, in Nick Sharma's cookbook, which is called

Season. And a bebinca is a traditional Filipino dish, which is sometimes savory, sometimes sweet. Made with a kind of rice flour called mochiko flour. Hold on. Oh, well this one's actually made with all purpose flour. Interesting. Oh, well this is something completely different. Interesting. So his bebinca... Ooh, this is a Goan dessert. Interesting. I love the way traditions all overlap. So I know bebinca as a Filipino dessert that sort of overlaps with Hawaiian Butter Mochi, which is this chewy, delicious, amazing thing that I recently made for some neighbors who are gluten free. But here in Nick's book, he describes bebinca as the ultimate Goan dessert, an egg and coconut milk pudding, which can be made in several ways.

Hrishi: Oh, my God. That sounds so good already. It's almost like a flanny texture?

Samin: Yeah. He says, "My grandmother made one, type that's called mock bebinca, flavored with mashed sweet potatoes, and scented with freshly grated nutmeg. I always make this recipe for Thanksgiving, but it's really a year-round treat." And it looks so good. It looks very flanny. It looks so good.

Hrishi: I'm looking at it right now.

Samin: Oh, my God. It looks so good. We need to have a rule-

Samin: We can't record before dinner.

Hrishi: -just like don't shop hungry. We cannot do this podcast hungry.

Samin: I know, it's bad.

Hrishi: That sounds so good. I really want to eat that.

Samin: Well, Abby, I hope that these ideas help. I don't think that there's one use that's going to use up eight pounds of potatoes for a typical American family. But I hope that at least one or two of these ideas speak to you.

Hrishi: I mean, that's a breakfast, lunch, dinner, dessert set of solutions right there.

Samin: It really is.

Hrishi: By the way, speaking of dessert, I have not been able to stop thinking about what we talked about in our last episode, our Emperor of Ice Cream poetry themed ice cream shop.

Samin: Uh-oh.

Hrishi: And flavors.

Samin: Are you making ... You have a little Post-It note next to your bed?

Hrishi: Just in my head. What about a flavor called Rumi Raisin?

Samin: Oh, no. I wish you could see me. I'm just holding my head in my hands.

Hrishi: I thought you might actually be able to come up with a recipe for a plum sorbet.

Samin: Sure. Are you going to do a William Carlos Williams ... Is this going to be-

Hrishi: I thought it could be called Plum Icebox Plums. It's a thinker. But he's got the plums in the icebox already. All you have to do is turn them into ice cream or sorbet.

Samin: I actually have the plums in the icebox already.

Hrishi: So how would you turn them into a sorbet?

Samin: I would just put them in the food processor with some sugar. If I had a little plum liquor or another fruit liquor, I might put a little bit of that in there and either blend them or food process them until they were all the way silky, and then freeze them in a sorbet machine.

Hrishi: That's great. Even if we don't even get to see this ice cream shop-

Samin: We're going to have a long list of flavors. I think this should just be a recurring segment. What if you just contained all the puns to this part of the podcast?

Hrishi: You know I can't promise that.

Samin: You could do 13 Ways of Looking at a Blackberry.

Hrishi: There you go! You're in. Now you're in.

Samin: Oh, no. At Once Upon a Time, I was full of these.

Hrishi: That's also what I'm talking about.

Samin: I also had a whole jazz music thing. I was really into jazz music for a short time-

Hrishi: And in that time, did you refer to it as jazz music?

Samin: No. Okay. Are you really have a great time at my expense?

Hrishi: I'm having a great time. I'm just thinking about all the other things that you might've enjoyed around that time like fiction books.

Samin: I had this little old Volvo sedan, and when I started learning about jazz, we started naming all the different parts of the car after jazz musicians. There's "Lena Horn," "Thelonious Trunk." "Miles Per Hour Davis-

Hrishi: Oh, my God.

Samin: Was the speedometer.

Hrishi: I'm so proud-

Samin: It was so good.

Hrishi: To be your friend.

Samin: It was so good. You really would've loved it. It was really good.

Hrishi: Wow. "Thelonious Trunk." That's terrific. That's great. Okay. And that's it for this episode.

Samin: Thanks for listening. And by the way, if you've been enjoying our show, tell your friends, and maybe you leave us a review on Apple Podcasts.

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Samin: Just record a voice memo and send it to us at alittlehomecooking@gmail.com.

Hrishi: Our website is homecooking.show, where you can find recipes and resources, and transcripts of each episode.

Samin: You can follow me @caiosamin on Twitter and Instagram.

Hrishi: And I'm @Hrishihirway.

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

Hrishi: We'll be back with a new episode in two weeks.

Samin: Until then, I am Samin.

Hrishi: And I'm Hrishi.

Samin: And we'll be home cooking.