

APL Volumes

Season 2, Episode 6: MADE YOU COOK

*This episode was transcribed by APL volunteer Martha Ladyman.*

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

LETICIA: Hey, y'all! Welcome to Season Two of APL Volumes, Austin Public Library's podcast about all the cool things at the library and the staff who are passionate about them. I'm Leticia Leal, your host for this season and a Teen Program Specialist at APL Central Library.

The theme of this season is Everything But The Books, where we explore parts of APL's collection and programming that you might not expect to find at a library. This episode is all about cooking, and I'm talking to Rachele Merliss, Youth Librarian at Southeast, and Katie Middleton, Library Associate at Central. Let's get cooking!

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LETICIA: Hello. Welcome back to Volumes. Today my guests are Katie Middleton and Rachele Merliss, and we are talking about one of my favorite subjects, cooking! What got you into cooking. Katie?

KATIE: I have always liked cooking. I grew up wanting to watch my mom cook in the kitchen. Some of my favorite memories of doing that are in the kitchen with my mom and talking about baking and stuff, and learning a couple of recipes from my grandma.

LETICIA: And Rachele, how about you?

RACHELE: Definitely similar. Yeah, I think family kind of got me into cooking. And also, honestly, love of reading and books got me into cooking because I just would read anything I could get my hands on and that was cookbooks a lot of the time in my house because that was just something we had a lot of. So there was always something new to read if I got bored of the regular books. So I was reading cookbooks all the time as a kid, and that made me want to cook.

And then I feel like once I realized I liked cooking I got back into cookbooks again. So it is like a reciprocal relationship between cooking and reading about cooking. They kind of feed into each other.

LETICIA: That kind of segues into my next question. What is one of your earliest memories about cooking or one of the first things you remember making?

RACHELE: I remember making, or, well, kind of trying to make, guacamole with my mom. She would always do this really sweet thing where if I stirred one thing or added one thing into whatever she was making she would tell everyone I made it. It was really nice. It was totally a lie. So she would be, like, "Rachele made the guacamole." And I got to feel really proud and feel a sense of ownership.

LETICIA: That's so sweet and encouraging!

RACHELE: Yeah.

LETICIA: How about you, Katie?

KATIE: I was trying to think. I have a really good memory of learning to make this pie with my grandma? Because I remember similarly being so proud of myself. Because it was a pie you don't bake. It was an....

LETICIA: Icebox pie?

KATIE: Lemon icebox pie.

LETICIA: Oooh!

KATIE: So the lemon cures the egg in it. So you don't bake it. You throw it in the oven to crisp the meringue up. But we were doing it old fashioned. We were just mixing the eggs up in the kitchen. And I, she was in her eighties, and she was old and not that strong, and I was, like, seven. And I was like, "I'm going to whip these so hard." And I did it without a hand mixer and I remember being so proud of myself. That's one of the recipe cards that I have that's all typed out. She taught me how to do that, and she taught me how to make a meatloaf when I stayed one weekend or something with my mom, with her. And I still have those recipe cards on my fridge.

LETICIA: We've only been talking three minutes and my heart has grown eight sizes.

KATIE: That's what cooking does!

LETICIA: So that is one of my favorite things about cooking, is there is always the, "You can taste the love in it." But it is true.

One of the best things about cooking is, you can bring in your culture, you can bring in your family recipes. That's very admirable.

When you were talking about making the whipped cream, it reminds me. I used to be a kid's cooking instructor with Sticky Fingers. And one of the activities I would give to some of the rowdier kids, because this was after school so I didn't expect much from them. They had already been in school all day. So I would give them just a jar with the heavy whipping cream. And I'd be, like, "Let's make butter! Come on! Shake it up! Shake it up until it makes butter."

And that's another thing. Cooking is also STEM. So, Rachele, you are a children's librarian at Southeast, at our Southeast branch. Everyone, go visit.

RACHELE: Yes, come visit the Southeast branch!

LETICIA: Have you been able to incorporate cooking with kids over there in any way?

RACHELE: Yeah, definitely. I know that before I started in the position they had a ramen program that was super popular. Apparently the line was out the door. Recently we had our candy sushi program, which is not exactly cooking.

LETICIA: So fun!

RACHELE: Yeah, it was kind of combining arts and crafts with food, which is of course going to be a really popular activity. We had so many people at that, which I was not necessarily expecting. I did not know how many numbers we would get. But it just shows that when you offer food people come.

LETICIA: Yes! What did you use to make the candy sushi?

RACHELE: We used fruit rollups and hard candies from HEB and just kind of lots of different candies. And also Rice Krispie bars to make them come together. Yeah. So the kids all got a sugar rush. But it was really fun to watch them interact with their food in that way.

LETICIA: Katie, how have you been able to incorporate cooking into your work here at APL?

KATIE: So me and a coworker, we started the APL Cooking Club this year.

LETICIA: So fun!

KATIE: Yeah, and so we both work at Central Library, and the Central Library has a really awesome demonstration area that happens to have basically a whole kitchen hidden away in it. So we have the benefit of being able to use

that. We meet once a month, the second Tuesday of every month, and we always have a different topic. We've done ... We just started in March? April? One of those months.

LETICIA: It was early Spring. In Spring!

KATIE: But we've had a couple of fun ones. We like to play different games and give handouts and always have a bunch of books. So those are really fun because when it goes well, when people come to them, we really enjoy hearing from everyone who shows up what they like to do. And learn from them as well as what we've prepared in case there is any dead air.

LETICIA: Yeah, I saw when you were setting up for the chai one for Cooking Club. I almost said chai tea but that's redundant. But I got to look, and I was peeking in at all the spices.

KATIE: That one was so fun. That was our first real true demo we did with the kitchen pulled out and everything, with the stove. And that was really amazing. We actually, so we made the chai, Hannah made the chai. And I MC'd. And we actually had a really good audience participation from the people who came. Even though it really was a demo it really did still kind of feel like the Cooking Club. Because people were talking and asking each other questions.

LETICIA: Nice! And I bet they had some ideas of what they put in their chai. I bet people were invited to come down just by the smell of it because of all those beautiful fragrances.

KATIE: Definitely.

LETICIA: So what are some upcoming Cooking Club programs that you have in the future?

KATIE: Since the beginning of planning one of the things we've been most excited to do is dumplings. So we are going to do that for Lunar New Year. So in January our meeting is going to be dumplings. We are still working on the ins and outs of it, but hopefully we are going to have a way for people to practice folding the dumplings. Because that is the hardest and the most fun part of it besides eating it. And then also have some dumplings for people. If not actually the ones we make, at least have some dumplings for people to eat. Because you have to be fed if you do the hard work of folding them. So that's going to be a really fun one coming up.

LETICIA: What is one of the most exciting things that you see when people come out to the Cooking Club?

KATIE: I think it's really amazing to see people show up just for us. That is really cool when people, and they haven't been to the Central Library before but they saw it on Eventbrite or they saw it somewhere and they are looking for that sense of community, and to learn about cooking more. And to see us as a fun and safe space to do so is just so heartening. Because that's what we wanted when we came up with this whole thing.

So it's always really cool when we get a new person who comes up and tells us, "Oh, yeah, I want to learn about this thing." Or "I'm really kind of stuck on PB&J and how can I learn some cool new stuff?" And then to see other patrons who have come to the event say, "Oh, I really like to make this." And "I used to have trouble with this, but this is how I decided to get over that or to learn this new skill." And that's always really cool.

LETICIA: So let's talk about now some of our favorite things that we have in our collection. The APL has a lot of different wonderful cookbooks and cooking videos as well. Do you have any favorites, Rachele?

RACHELE: Yeah, so something I love keeping an eye on in our collection is which cookbooks are going out and what's popular and what, when we get it in, does it go out immediately? What flies off the shelf? I am always keeping an eye on those. So I kind of, in preparation for this, went through our collection and grabbed some cookbooks that I know are popular from the children's section, the English section and the Spanish section.

So we have some really great cookbooks for kids. And yeah, you having that experience of being a children's cooking instructor, you know how cool that is.

LETICIA: Yes! It is! I really do love kid's cooking because they are more encouraged to eat whatever they are making, if they see what goes into it and they help prepare it. When I was doing cooking class it was all vegetarian. So they were eating mushrooms and green onions and all sorts of things. And we also would focus on different cultures so they were also learning as well. Cooking is STEM!

RACHELE: Yes! That's so important with different types of produce too. Sometimes people grow up with, if you only ever have boiled cauliflower, you are going to think vegetables are really boring and mushy. Then if you learn different preparations and ways that different cultures have interacted with different types of produce, it can really open your whole world. Cooking can be joyful. Eating can be amazing.

LETICIA: Yes, I learned this when I learned how to roast vegetables. It was like, wow, what a difference! Roasted broccoli! It's the best thing in the world! Roasted brussels sprouts. Holy moly!

Well, let's get back to the book.

RACHELE: Well, I have a couple of books here. This one is called *How to Cook in Ten Easy Lessons*, by Wendy Sweetser.

LETICIA: She has an applicable name. Wendy Sweetser.

RACHELE: I know. Like Mary Berry. I wish I had a name like that. This is exactly what you were talking about how cooking is STEM. We can talk about all the different techniques that go into it that give you different types of results.

LETICIA: Different reactions. Like yeast, which scares me.

RACHELE: Wait, me too!

LETICIA: Like, yeast is a creature. Yeah, I had a sourdough starter for a little bit and people were like, "You have to feed it." And I was like, "What?"

That pet did not last.

RACHELE: Yeah, that is my family's favorite thing to roast me about, is that yeast really freaks me out. Always, since I was a kid. But it is also amazing, and I appreciate it.

LETICIA: But it is STEM, with the measurements. But this is very cool, *How to Cook in Ten Easy Lessons*. I think I might need that.

KATIE: Yeah! Me too!

RACHELE: And there's another one that I have here. It's called, *Where Does My Food Come From?* This is a new book, so I think it came out recently. But it is so cool because the whole first section is about information about food. The contents are eggs, cheese, tomatoes – one of our favorite topics – pasta, strawberries, honey and chocolate. So they really dive deep into each of those ingredients that kids will probably be familiar with.

And then they give you an activity for each one. So it might be a food that you can actually eat, or it might be about, you know, dyeing eggs. Which is also really fun, and a great science activity.

LETICIA: No, I love that. Because there are so many kids who are, I bet, all they know is that the eggs come in a carton at the store. Where did it come from? How did they get there?

That's very fascinating. I'd want to read that. I also like that there is a lot of food with faces drawn on them.

RACHELE: It's a really cute-looking book. But yeah, to your point, learning about food is a great way to get into learning about your community. Yeah, learning about, where does food come from? Who are the farmers, who transports the food? Who is keeping the soil healthy? It's just a chapter that you can start from and then you can go in so many different directions.

LETICIA: Katie? Do you have any favorites?

KATIE: I am not a children's librarian, but I love being in the children's room.

RACHELE: That's the best place to be!

LETICIA: I hear that!

KATIE: So about a third of what I check out, probably half of what I check out, are adult cookbooks. And then a third is children's materials. And the other little bit of that ratio left over I don't even know. Novels.

But, so I read a lot of kid's materials. And one of my favorite things that I found in there recently or in this past year is a series by Angela Ferraro-Fanning that's called *A Blank Treasury of Recipes, Crafts, and Wisdom*.

LETICIA: For the appropriate season.

KATIE: So she has four of them for the different seasons. Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter. And they are just adorable little books. They have beautiful illustrations. It says it's got recipes, crafts and wisdom. There are great little ideas of things to do with kids. The illustrations are beautiful.

LETICIA: Oh, look at all these pumpkins! I love pumpkins!

KATIE: I have the Fall one in front of me. We've actually used, we've put these on our Bibliocommons list before. I think it is silly when people discount children's materials as being for kids and that adults can't get anything out of them. This has so much good information.

LETICIA: And it is delivered in an accessible way.

KATIE: In a totally adorable way.

LETICIA: Yes, adorable. Adorable is the correct word there.

KATIE: Yeah! Who doesn't want to make acorn cap candles?

LETICIA: I should do that. I have so many acorns in my backyard. I will do that.

KATIE: So cute. And cinnamon apple sauce. Delicious.

LETICIA: I had some today at lunch. But I did not make it. I just bought it.

KATIE: I'll let you check this book out when I'm done with it.

LETICIA: Yes, I am very excited. It has a squirrel on the cover, so I'm in.

Well, Rachele, outside of work, I remember you told me you have a cookbook club with your friends, right?

RACHELE: Yeah, I do! It's been so fun. So we started it as a *Salt Fat Acid Heat* Book Club. That's the book by Samin Nosrat. I love that book, and my friend Pili really loves it too. So we were talking about trying to get together once a month and focus on one chapter and cook something from that chapter and bring it. And we told some people about it, and it ended up being a really big group. So we have this, like, a monthly pot luck.

I will say the format of doing a one month salt, one month fat, etc., well you can imagine. During the fat meeting we had so many cakes and desserts. So we were like, OK, maybe next time we should make it a little more balanced. But overall, it was just a super fun way to learn about food and to dive more deeply into the book. I had read it, but I got to come back to it in a new way.

LETICIA: APL also, they have a lot of other different cooking programs. They have an Eat The World and a Snack The World, which I think is also very clever. So they get snacks from different countries all around the world.

But we recently had a Cambodian Pop Up here at Central, right?

KATIE: Yeah. So Eat The World is, I think, every other month here at Central on Saturdays. And they are always so cool. Usually they partner with Common Threads, which is an Austin area group, and they'll work to match us with a chef who will come out and that knows the cuisine. And they always do a really cool job of incorporating nutritional information as well as the cultural aspects of whatever they are cooking that time.

But recently for AANHPI history month for our big event that we had here at Central that day, Eat The World partnered with a pop-up from Austin called Mama Kong, and Sherry and Brandon were so cool, so awesome. I got to host it that day. And they did a great job. They made some really awesome soup that smelled so good!

They are really cool there in the community. They were great presenters. They do pop-ups and they do their own pop-ups that are really like a whole dinner. And they also do pop-ups usually I think at Kitty Cohen's. And they are about to do one, I saw in Instagram yesterday, or they just did one where they did stuffed chicken wings. I don't even know, it sounded so good.

LETICIA: What? How do you do that?

KATIE: And then I saw another one that was fried chicken with, I'm going to say it wrong even though they said it so many times. That Cambodian seasoning, kroeung? Something like that? They made that as like the seasoning. It sounds so good.

LETICIA: Yeah, that sounds delicious and fascinating. I don't know that much about Cambodian cooking.

KATIE: Yeah, I don't either. But I will say, like the coolest thing of being there and they cooked it all, they did that, and they had a great rapport with everyone.

And afterwards when we went to go serve everything, it was so neat. I was just kind of standing around answering any questions anybody had and making sure it was going smoothly, and a couple of different young ladies came over separately to Sherry and said that they were in the States for studying I think, I think they were students. But they were away from home and I think one was maybe from Cambodia. And one was from a surrounding country. But they both came specifically that day to the library because they knew we were going to have Cambodian food and they couldn't find authentic food in the area. And they were really missing home. They came because they knew that Sherry and her family are Cambodian and it was going to be real food. And it was really, really sweet to see that interaction.

LETICIA: That's amazing! That's one of the best things, I think, about cooking. We touched on it a bit earlier, is how you can reach the community in different ways and different cultures.

What are some of your favorite different kinds of cooking? Rachele?

RACHELE: Well, I've been a vegetarian since I was eight, fully due to childhood stubbornness, and now I've just gone with that decision that I made. But I was the only vegetarian in my family, so learning to tweak something to make it vegetarian is something that I now find really fun and really satisfying. I'll hear about a food that I've never had before and I am like, "I have to have it. It sounds so good."

I've never had a Rubeen, and recently I got obsessed with trying to have a Rubeen so I figured it out. I tried a bunch of different things. I made one with tofu and then there was also this recipe that was based on a sandwich from a café in Brooklyn where they use broccoli as the meat substitute. It was so good. I was a little bit suspicious of that one but it was actually so good.

KATIE: I was thinking something cruciferous like beets or something.

RACHELE: Yes. I feel like beets would work really well.

LETICIA: That sounds really delicious.

RACHELE: I recently saw someone use beet juice to dye the tofu so that it looks, it just turned out really pretty. Loving beets, I was like, "I would do that."

LETICIA: My friend Julia used to have a vegan Jewish food truck. I don't remember the name right now. It was a Yiddish word. Smaltz? She used to have a vegan Rubeen that was widely heralded as quite good, so I will have to get some tips from her for you.

RACHELE: Please! Vegan Jewish food. That's my dream as a Jewish person. That sounds incredible.

LETICIA: I'll hook you up with her. Because she is a vegan Jewish person. She has all the goods.

Katie, what do you like to cook or bake?

KATIE: I am much more of an adventurous baker than I am a cooker.

LETICIA: And that's interesting because baking sometimes requires exact measurements.

KATIE: Yeah, baking is the STEM-iest cooking.

LETICIA: Yeah, it's definitely the STEM-iest cooking. What does STEM stand for?

KATIE: Science.

LETICIA: Technology. Engineering. And Math. There you go.

Just letting the people know so they won't think we are talking about broccoli stems or slang for legs.

KATIE: It's the STEAMIEST cooking because it is art.

LETICIA: Yes, definitely.

KATIE: And there's steaming.

LETICIA: Just like the dumplings.

KATIE: Yeah, just like I said. I check out a dumb amount of cookbooks. I just have a really hard time saying "No." or "Check it out later." It's just, "Take it home." But I have a hard time actually making myself make the recipes from cookbooks. I kind of just look through them. I love looking through all the beautiful pictures and reading the stories that accompany the recipes. But actually following a recipe? My brain can't do it unless it is baking.

And even then, because baking I know I have to follow so it comes out properly. But I also have been baking long enough that my ego is a little too high. And my roommate will make fun of me because I will make a recipe for the first time baking, and I'll go, "You know, I think it should have this in it." Or "I think actually I'll add more of this and less of this." Before I have ever even made it for the first time.

LETICIA: You are, "I think that we don't have to put as much salt in this." Or, "I think I'm going to put salt in this."

KATIE: Right. Exactly.

RACHELE: A little bit of salt is never a bad idea.

LETICIA: No, it is good. It makes it flavorful. Especially in sweet things.

KATIE: So sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. I'm better about following recipes with baking stuff, but I really tend to use cookbooks more as inspiration to draw from. Even the ones that I buy, "This is a beautiful cookbook, which is great. I'm going to use it so much." And I don't. But I still love collecting them.

LETICIA: I like them too. I especially like those old ones you would get from churches. Not the Church's Chicken, the different churches like community cookbooks. Sometimes they are spiral bound. You can't buy them anywhere. You have to get them from vintage stores.

I think you told me there was a store just dedicated to cookbooks.

KATIE: So recently at the beginning of this year I went to Portland to visit a friend who had just moved there. And one of the last places we went to, literally on the way to the airport, was a small, vintage, secondhand bookshop that was in this little house that just had like three rooms in it. And the guy who I think owned it was there. He was the only one there. It was just him and three cats. It was awesome.

But I noticed that one of the rooms was almost just completely cooking and different things like that. And they had a whole bookshelf that was just those community cookbooks. And I ended up talking to him about it because I thought that was so amazing.

And he said, "Oh that's actually kind of our specialty. We focus on the cooking and things like that, and that's why we have so many of them." If I lived in Portland I would go there all the time and spend so much money. Because literally the things they had the most of were cookbooks and old vintage children's books.

LETICIA: That's the money right there. And they have cats?

KATIE: And they have three cats. And one of them was the softest cats I have ever pet in my whole entire life. And they just sit there and wanted you to pet them. That was great.

But they had all of those community cookbooks that were vintage from the fifties and sixties and things like that. Do you mind if I plug something real quick?

LETICIA: No, I would love for you to plug something.

KATIE: So one of the things that we are trying to do with APL Cooking Club is to kind of make one of those. And this will maybe tie in with another one of y'all's episodes this season. But if we can get enough submissions. So this is also a call to the community, y'all. Send us your submissions. We're still working on how to maybe find a home somewhere, so it is easier to get to electronically? But right now we have APL Cooking Club recipe cards that are printed, and we have them at Central. Hopefully we'll have them at the branches soon, maybe if we can work it out.

RACHELE: Please!

KATIE: And there is a QR code on it, if you want to do it electronically. Or you can fill out the recipe card. They are cute. I designed them. They are all fun colors and things like that. Once we collect enough recipes from the community of people's favorite things, hopefully stuff that they created themselves, or that is passed down from friends and family, a favorite that they make every holiday for this one particular thing or something like that, when we get them in we would love to make an APL Cooking Club community zine.

LETICIA: Oh, that would be amazing!



KATIE: Yeah, a cookbook zine. That is the dream, and it's all based on those community cookbooks.

LETICIA: I have one from the St. Louis Symphony. I was like, "Where did I get this?" I like it. I love those community cookbooks. They have the people's names. Like this recipe is by Betsy Johnson. It's like, no, not Betsy Johnson. That's the designer. But a lovely old lady named Agnes Johnson, lovely old ladies who pass their recipes down.

But we were talking a little bit about how you cannot follow recipes except in baking. So now I would like to hear about your cooking failures.

RACHELE: So many. So many. This is a great question. Let's see.

I tried to make this pasta with chickpeas at some point. It was from a YouTube video. And the person on the YouTube video was saying you have to add a splash of white wine. It changes everything and it makes it so good. But I didn't have white wine and I didn't know how acid works in cooking at the time.

LETICIA: Ah yes. But now you know. You've read the book.

RACHELE: Once I read the book I realized why this had gone so wrong in this moment with this chickpea pasta. I didn't have the wine and I didn't think it could be that important because it was such a small amount. But it just did not taste right. It was not what it was supposed to be. It was pasta combined with chickpeas and garlic and red pepper flakes and all the things that I love. It sounds like it would be so good.

LETICIA: That really does sound delicious.

RACHELE: And it would have been with a splash of wine.

LETICIA: A splash of white wine.

RACHELE: A little bit of lemon juice would have been really good. Lemon zest. Basically just it needed something to wake it up. And the result of it not having that unfortunately to me was it tasted like tuna noodle casserole.

KATIE: For an avid vegetarian, that's probably pretty bad.

RACHELE: Yes, I remember eating that before I became a vegetarian, when I was very little, and oh my god, I hated it.

LETICIA: Tuna noodle. I love tuna noodle casserole and never get to eat it because no one in my household likes it. So I'm not going to make a whole casserole. Also, my partner is crazy, and he just doesn't like the word casserole. So he won't eat them. I have to call them, I call them mix-ups. Or I call them bakes. Here's a chicken and rice bake.

KATIE: As a Midwesterner, he needs to get on board with the casseroles.

LETICIA: I know. He's never been to the Midwest.

KATIE: Oh, come on!

LETICIA: Yes, the Midwest is amazing. I went there when I was in a Devo cover band, we'll talk about that but that's not the topic. But I went there, and we went to a show after at a bowling alley called Maple Lanes, and in the back they were having a punk show. But these middle-aged women showed up from a church and they were like, "We have some leftover food." And they brought in big trays of beef stroganoff and cabbage. And I remember telling my friend, who is from the Midwest, and he was like, "Yeah, that is like the most Midwest thing that could have possibly ever happened."

OK, let's hear about your cooking failure.

KATIE: Oh, again, this is like two years ago now probably. I got really into making focaccia.

Claire Saffitz, our hero, our lady. From her first cookbook I made her focaccia recipes so many times. I was so proud of myself. I was like, I can make bread! I'm doing so great. Because bread is something that has always scared me.

I am not, luckily, afraid of the yeast. But I am afraid of the technique. And the time that it takes. I don't have the patience. I also have two cats, so counterspace is hard.

LETICIA: I hear that. My cat is over twenty years old so he is like geriatric, but somehow he always knows. Sometimes I can tell he does not know where he is and I can call his name and he might be a little deaf. But somehow he always knows when I am cooking so I guess his nose works quite well. Cooking or eating ice cream or yogurt he will always come over.

Yes, yes, the counterspace. I am familiar with that.

KATIE: Yes. So, I thought I was doing great. I was proud of myself. And I wanted to share it with my friends. And that is something that I do a lot because I bake. You think you want 36 cookies, but you don't. So you have to palm them off on people.

So I made a giant, because her recipe makes a whole sheet pan. So I cut it all up and I was so proud of it, and I put fresh rosemary on it and sea salt crystals on top and everything. And I think I put olives in some of it, and didn't do it on others because I knew some of my friends didn't like olives. This whole big thing in my head.

And I took it to work and I gave it out in little baggies to each person that I thought would like it. And then I went home and I ate the bread. And it was so salty. I was seasoning it with the salt at the end with the herbs and everything. I had even made an herb oil, and I had let the herbs like sit in the oil. And everything with garlic. I really thought I was "cheffing" so hard.

And because I had the herb oil on top, when I was putting the Maldon sea salt crystals on there, it would just kind of disappear. And I couldn't see how much was there. And I hadn't measured it. I was just like, pinching, sprinkling, doing a little salt bae. And I did too much.

So, add salt to your recipes, but measure it.

So I had already given it out to everybody. So like the next day I was very sheepishly walking around, going, "My bread is usually better than that."

LETICIA: So, why don't we talk about some of your greatest successes?

KATIE: Please! Let's!

LETICIA: What is one of your favorite things that you make. What is, I'd like the signature Rachele dish, please? What would you give us?

RACHELE: I feel like I really enjoy vegetables in a way that will hopefully make people like them more, get more excited about them. And I feel like when someone doesn't like something it can be a great challenge. So I love hearing about what people like and don't like and trying to make something that I think will make them happy.

Recently I made some mushrooms. I bought the fancy mushrooms. But then I also mixed in a box of the not-fancy mushrooms. Because I can't afford to buy a bunch of the fancy mushrooms. So I mix them together and I'm like, "Ha! Ha! No one will know." So that's my tip. Buy one nice one. That's fine.

And then I made that chimichurri sauce to put over it. But actually I totally lucked out because the person at the store who was checking out my mushrooms, he gave me a tip on how to cook them and I had never cooked them that way before. But he told me to put the mushrooms in a hot skillet with no oil. And I actually at first I didn't

know if that was correct. And then I was texting my sister about how I was about to cook these mushrooms and she said, "Put them in a hot skillet with no oil."

So I was like, OK, two people have told me to do this way, so I will do it. And they came out really, really nicely. So they got a nice brown golden crust, which was exciting. That's what you are going for. And what can be really hard to achieve with mushrooms.

So now I finally know, and I'm going to make them a lot.

LETICIA: And what do you like? What is Katie's greatest food?

KATIE: Back to not cooking that much. I am afraid of cooking proteins. Weirdly enough, chicken is the one thing that I feel super comfortable with.

LETICIA: That's the one everyone struggles with.

KATIE: I'm a master. Anything else I'm not going to try it. Honestly, I'm just not. But I can make delicious juicy chicken.

LETICIA: I love a delicious juicy chicken. I like-a the juice.

KATIE: My roommate even goes, "How do you do that?" And I go, "I haven't the slightest. Put a lid on it."

LETICIA: There are some tricks and tips.

KATIE: Chicken tips.

LETICIA: Chicken tips. And owning a meat thermometer is a huge game changer. An instant meat thermometer.

KATIE: I don't know, this is maybe not the best tip to give out. But if you feel comfortable with it, once you get the thermometer to get your bearings, something I learned I think from a YouTube video a while ago is if you are cooking a chicken breast or something in a pan, which is my go-to way of doing it as I live in an apartment. If you think your chicken is about done, press on it with your finger. You can kind of get what it's supposed to feel like. It has a certain amount of resistance. Then you know it is cooked.

And that way you don't have to pull it out of the pan and cut into it. You're not supposed to cut into it until it's cool, so you don't release all the juices. But if you are wanting to make sure that you are not going to poison your dinner guests, you want to cut it to be sure.

LETICIA: You don't want Gordon Ramsay to yell at you.

KATIE: My Katie meal is beautiful roasted chicken that has a peri-peri sauce so it is similar and kind of chimichurri-esque.

LETICIA: And what is a peri-peri sauce?

KATIE: It's peppers. It's spicy-ish pepper sauce.

LETICIA: Nice.

KATIE: And so actually I got it from YouTube. I love Food YouTube. And you get the dehydrated peppers and then you rehydrate them and you blend them up with some yogurt, because that has the acid in it, to go in the chicken. And a couple of other spices. Paprika and some other spices.

LETICIA: That sounds wonderful.

KATIE: It is delicious. Because it gets crispy and then the best part, the best part is that you cut up the yellow potatoes and put them on the bottom with the part of the sauce that you don't use as the marinade on the potatoes. And then the chicken goes on top. And all of the juices go into the potatoes. It's so good.

LETICIA: The juice! Speaking of peppers, I heard the Cooking Club is going to do a pepper program sometime soon. Pepper program.

KATIE: Last summer we did a pepper one that was so really fun. So we figured, August is the hottest month of the year. Let's talk about hot things. So peppers, peppers galore. I've got all the capsaicins and the different heat levels and things like that. And also, because we had to reward people for coming out into the heat, we got the beautiful Otter Pops to cool off with. So that was our cheat to have food at our thing without blowing people's mouths off.

LETICIA: I love Otter Pops, the push pops. But I am guilty of eating like four in a row. One is not enough.

KATIE: That's OK.

LETICIA: Do you have any upcoming cooking programs at the branch?

RACHELE: We don't have any planned at the moment, but we definitely hope to get more into it soon. You can always know that at our big events that we do, like when we have our annual Noche de Fiesta in December or when we have our Dia de los Niños/Libros in the Spring, that we always have food at those. So that's important.

LETICIA: Nice. Come on out!

RACHELE: Yes! It's important to us to feed people, when they come to our big events. And we get really great pastries from local bakeries. We got really good volovanes, which a lot of people hadn't had before.

LETICIA: What is that?

RACHELE: It's like a Mexican pastry that is inspired by French pastry. I had not known what it was, but I picked them up and they made my car smell amazing.

LETICIA: I thought I was pretty well versed in pan dulces, but I had not heard of that one.

RACHELE: Yeah, I was pretty well surprised too. I hadn't heard of them. But they were super popular and everybody asked if we would have them again. So the answer is yes, of course!

LETICIA: I'm going to have to come out to Southeast!

RACHELE: Yeah! Come on down!

LETICIA: We talked about our favorite children's cooking books. Do you have any adult ones that you really like?

RACHELE: Yeah, definitely. We've been talking about how the library has so many good ones in its collection. Right now my favorite cookbook is called *The Korean Vegan*. And definitely someone who I found by watching food videos. Her name is Joanne Molinaro. She is amazing. Her book is just so beautiful. She took the photographs herself. It's just so visually beautiful.

But all the recipes that I make from that are such a hit with the people that I've made them for, and that is obviously the best feeling. I especially love a recipe that she has for fried cauliflower. Cauliflower is my favorite vegetable. So yeah, just amazing. And I love Korean food. It's so cool to get to try it in new ways and make it at home when I had previously only had it out.

So I love that cookbook. Some other ones that are popular at the library ... we have cookbooks by celebrities which I think are so fun. I grabbed this one by Ayesha Curry called *The Full Plate*.

LETICIA: She has a few!

RACHELE: Yes, she has a few and they are really popular. But really, if there is anyone who you like and who you know is a chef you can find a book by them. That can be a cool kind of journey where you go from liking someone as a celebrity or hearing them on a podcast or something and thinking they were really cool, and then realizing they actually have some cookbooks that you can check out. That's always really fun.

We also have, at the Southeast branch we have a big Spanish section. I noticed that our books about making your own paletas are really popular.

LETICIA: Oh, paletas!

RACHELE: Yes! This book is always gone, so I was really happy I was actually able to grab it for this recording, because it checks out a lot. As it should. Austin summers get wild so it's really great to be able to be able to make your own paletas.

LETICIA: Sandia y limon! That looks wonderful!

RACHELE: Yes, it looks so good. All of them, really. So, that's another great one.

There's this one. It's called *Cuba*, and it's all about Cuban cooking. It's in Spanish. Yeah, there's so many good adult ones to find in the collection.

LETICIA: Yeah. That's so awesome. We keep touching on how there are different cultures. I learned there is a book we have in the system about helado, about different Mexican ice creams. Because apparently Mexico, they make special delicious ice cream. So we have a whole book with different recipes for the different states in Mexico, the different ice creams you can get there. I don't remember the name of it, unfortunately, but I do know it is about helado, the ice cream. And yeah, that book just went pfff! from my mind. I've got to go to Mexico and eat their ice cream because it looks fantastic.

Katie, do you have a favorite?

KATIE: My newest favorite is called *Now and Again*. And it's by Julia Turshen. And it blew my mind when I checked it out a couple of weeks ago. I went and bought it. I do the thing that I think a lot of people do right now with our phones. If I see something, a book or a recipe within the book that I think is really cool, I take a picture of it. But I was taking a photo of like every recipe in that book, and I was just like, "I'm going to buy it. I've just got to buy it." It's really cool because she did the whole thing is based on the idea of, here are some recipes that have leftovers, and leftovers are great, but you don't necessarily want to eat the same thing two or three times.

LETICIA: Yes, I was just actually talking with my mom about this.

KATIE: So she's built the structure of the book to be the base of four recipes or something like that in each section that are a meal together, and then the secondary part of the chapter is how you recreate, how you put those leftovers into something new that's a different cuisine or a different flavor profile than what it was in the first meal. So you are getting two different meals out of it. It's not really meal prepping. Which I like because meal prepping can be intimidating.

LETICIA: And monotonous.

KATIE: Yeah. And so, it's fun. You are not intentionally making leftovers but that's what happens when you cook. And some of the stuff is really creative and really cool. So that's my thing.

RACHELE: That sounds amazing!p

KATIE: Yeah, I want to bounce off of your celebrity cookbooks. That is one of the funniest things to me about our collection and about cookbooks in general, is that anyone can have a cookbook. A lot of times, it's not even just a chef. It's just any celebrity. And not even celebrities. Like, a TV show. The amount in the last two years ...

LETICIA: We do have a lot of TV shows books. Like a *Game of Thrones* cookbook.

KATIE: Like *Game of Thrones*. Like *Schitt's Creek*. Snoop Dogg has three.

LETICIA: There's a Stephen King cookbook that came out lately, a *Castle Rock* cookbook, and I was like, I don't know if I want to eat anything from that world.

RACHELE: It doesn't really make me hungry when I think about Stephen King.

KATIE: I think those are so funny, and I'm glad you brought them up.

LETICIA: Yes, I checked out one by Tiffani Amber Thiessen. But it was not called Kelly Kapowski Kooks with a K. No, that's three K's. No, that's not the best name. But it was surprisingly good. I didn't even know she cooked. That's why I checked it out. I was like, that's random.

And Shaq recently put one out.

KATIE: The Shaq one.

LETICIA: Yes. And he looks very happy on the cover and satisfied. I always wonder, how much help do they get from the outside? They do list other people.

KATIE: Yeah, like Julia Turshen who did the *Now and Again*, she co-authored, not ghost wrote, Gwyneth Paltrow's first book. And that's why those recipes are so good. I love Julia Turshen.

LETICIA: The New York Times cookbooks are always checked out, the Alison Roman books? Those are never available.

RACHELE: They are never available.

LETICIA: But that doesn't mean that you should not come and try to check them out, everyone!

RACHELE: I literally, we got one of those in and I think it was her newest book, and I was about to check it in, and I knew it would immediately go back out on hold for someone, so first I opened it up, turned to a random page....

LETICIA: And took a picture of it?

RACHELE: Actually, I didn't have my phone on me so I just found something I wanted to make, read the recipe like three times and tried to commit it to memory, and I finally checked the book back in. And then I made it that night because I was afraid I was going to forget, and it was so good. It was like a snow pea salad with parmesan cheese. My friends really liked it.

LETICIA: I love parmesan cheese. I really add a lot, but you have to be careful as it is very salty. Yes, I have ruined a recipe with too much parmesan cheese.

So in terms of cooking, what would you like to see in the future at APL?

RACHELE: I would love to have more capacity to do cooking at the branches. Like we've talked about, Central has an amazing kitchen. When we have done cooking programs it's been kind of more preparation or like the ramen program. You can make ramen in a water boiler. Or something where you can use a toaster oven. I love getting creative like that. I think we could do more, even with what we have. I feel like we could be doing stuff with hot plates or those single little gas burners that you can plug in.

LETICIA: An electric skillet will also take you. And surprisingly, you know those little cupcake makers? You can make a lot of random things in there. You can put meatballs or vegan, vegetarian meatballs. They are like tiny little ovens. That's a tip from the cooking bee. George Foreman grill. But sorry to interrupt you.

RACHELE: No. I love that! I feel like getting creative with what we can do at the branches would be amazing. Also, what you just said reminded me that we had a really cool group that was meeting at the Southeast branch, maybe for six to eight weeks, where it was for people who wanted to have a baking business that they were running out of their home. The program was so popular that it basically filled up immediately and we had to promise everyone that we would do it again, that we would offer it again. And that was just teaching people how to get food permits and how to have everything be prepared in your home kitchen so that you can then sell cupcakes or tamales or whatever it is.

So yeah, I think having more programs like that, and maybe having an actual food component with them, would be just awesome.

LETICIA: That's an amazing resource.

RACHELE: Yeah.

KATIE: And that's a really confusing thing to try to learn on your own.

LETICIA: It is. There's lots of steps.

KATIE: We have to do it for the Cooking Club, and we have the resources to get the answers and things. But I'm still confused all the time.

RACHELE: Totally! And yeah, that's such a resource that the library can provide. If something is a big huge confusing process, we can break it down into steps for folks.

LETICIA: Are there any other resources do you think that we should be offering?

KATIE: So when we were first coming up with what the Cooking Club was going to be, we were thinking about doing basic skills and things. And we talked about how we could kind of demonstrate just the cooking skills, like knife skills or just how you use different tools. Different ways how you can do things. We are going to kind of do that, or we have done that in October when we were doing alliums. Demonstrating the different ways you can cut garlic and how those things go into making the garlic be different. So if you want to use fresh versus if you smash it.

LETICIA: Or roast it.

KATIE: Yeah, all of those things. But trying to give people the basics to feel more comfortable in their kitchen. But it's hard to figure out how to do that, because we can't just give knives to people. So I would love that kind of group, think some ways around that. That would be so cool if we could figure out a way to do those

LETICIA: Yeah, that's cool. I was kind of thinking of something similar for my teens. I thought it would be nice to send them out into the world with some life skills.

So, Katie, are there any local organizations that you like working with or that you think are cool?

KATIE: I haven't been able to work with them yet, but I really love all the cool Farmer's Markets in the area. Not even just the Farmer's Markets. Those are so cool and you can google those really easily. But there's also a lot of local farms in the Austin area, and so one of my favorites that I've literally been going to since I was a baby is Boggy Creek Farm. They actually just had their thirtieth anniversary of farming, I guess. That's Boggy Creek, Caroline and Larry.

LETICIA: That sounds very cool. And I hope you are able to cultivate a relationship with them.

KATIE: Just outside of Austin there used to be like a goat milk farm. I think they are called Texas Bee Tree. I think this is family owned. And she was raising all the goats and raising her own kids and everything. The goat kids and the kids. And I think she stopped doing the dairy because that was too much. But she still has the farm open to visits, and has built this big beautiful pavilion.

And they do classes out there on pickling and pizza date nights and things. And you get to go hand out with the farm dogs and the goats.

LETICIA: That sounds like a dream!

KATIE: Yeah. Boggy Creek Farm, other farms in the area. Really cool to see that connection, of where the food is coming from and what a farm actually looks like. All the cool things you can get there.

LETICIA: Nice! Well, this has been a very lovely conversation. I'm glad I had lunch before we recorded this, otherwise I would be starving. And we didn't even talk about my one note about tomato confit. But we can get to that next time.

It was really lovely talking to you. Katie, do you have a final thought?

KATIE: No.

LETICIA: No final thoughts? Rachele?

RACHELE: This was really great. Thanks for having us.

LETICIA: Of course! It was my pleasure. Bon appétit!

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LETICIA: Thank you for listening to this episode of APL Volumes, Season Two. Feel free to come by Central and drop off your recipe for our Cooking Club. An extra special thanks to my guests, Rachele Merliss and Katie Middleton for such a savory and enticing conversation.

APL Volumes is recorded and produced in the Library's Innovation Lab, a part of the APL Innovate Digital Maker Space. Come visit the Maker Space at the Central Library and explore our recording equipment and hardware and all kinds of audiovisual software for 3D modeling, graphic design, animation, and more. Many thanks to the APL Innovate team for their help behind the scenes on this podcast.

A huge thank you to Christen Hong, our editor; Peter Hofstad for being our marketing captain; Michael Wheat for our insanely cool logo; and Stephen Plail for our jaunty theme song.

This podcast is all library, all the time. This was our final episode of Season Two, and it was a pleasure being your host.

Until next time, thank you for listening and supporting your local public library.

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END TRANSCRIPT



