

## No Guts, No Glory

Written by Jack Sparacino

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*"No man is lonely while eating spaghetti."* - Christopher Morley (American writer, 1890-1957)

Having lost nearly 50 pounds this year, I've been paying more attention than usual to my diet and sagging appetite. Health challenges have kept me at home more than usual and away from my usual source for my favorite newspaper, *The New York Times*.

Enter *The Wall Street Journal*, which plops onto our driveway every morning. No longer do I blast through it, after my interest in other periodicals has been satisfied. The Journal has become a paper I actually read. Yeah, even the really conservative pieces and perspectives. Somewhat surprisingly, it has been a source of constant learning and less frequent throwaway lines like, "Are you guys nuts? Can anyone with a lubricated mind actually believe that?"

Or harsher words to that effect. I must admit that my increased attention to the Journal was in part forged by their frequent coverage of some piece of news I found somehow relevant to the weight loss. I doubt that serious foodies rely all that seriously on the Journal, but by golly they could. Just maybe. Here are a few recent examples of food (culinary?) enlightenment, sprinkled with a dash of sports. Ready to join me at the buffet? Here goes.

**1. Negative Calories, Anyone?** You probably already know I'm a bit of a science geek, so let's start with a little research. Bee Wilson wrote on 9/8-9 to inform us that many people become trapped in advertising rat holes that cause many people to believe, wishfully, that if you eat something healthy like a side salad along with that lusciously greasy cheeseburger with

fries, the total caloric value of the meal actually goes down. If you replace the burger with, say, a nice piece of grilled fish, people know that the salad adds calories to the overall meal. But the key is our being hyper-sensitive to trying to justify eating 'bad' foods because, well, they often taste pretty good.

Ms. Wilson notes that there's a sound financial reason why so many food packages that contain a lot of relatively useless calories, like certain breakfast cereals, also picture 'good' foods alongside, like sliced fruit. The fruit is (probably) subconsciously seen as a helping of negative calories, much like the salad paired with the burger. But no, eating five pounds of carrots a day doesn't negate or undermine that pile of French fries you really crave. Clever, those American advertisers!

**1. How About We Serve Your Soup in a Glass Slipper?** Or your hearty breakfast in a shovel? Marc Vartabedian exposed us in-the-know foodies on September 5 to a wide range of reasonably normal foods being served up by trendy (make that trendy-shmendy) restaurants in New Zealand, or on England's Isle of Man. But U.S. joints, er, upscale dining venues, have been getting into the act, including Chicago and (

*of*

*course*

), Beverly Hills.

Or is that off course? Aside from the fact that we southerners would linger toward the back of the shmendy line, food critics of note have weighed in on "creative" plating with a vengeance. French chef titan Jacques Pepin, he who spent many a grand TV show cooking with Julia Child, says the trend is "ridiculous" and "hides the lack of technique."

So beware, low country dwellers. The next time your server offers up your seafood in a miniature crab trap, complete with seaweed, remind them that while you weren't a dean at New York's International Culinary Center like Pepin, you know a fleecing when you see one. And speaking of fleece, can you tell me about the lamb stew? Can I get that on a, you know, regular plate? No? Well, baaah humbug.

**1. An Awful Lot of Offal.** This recent piece, under the catchy heading, "Menus Feature Odd Meats an Offal Lot," was written by Benjamin Parkin. No doubt to open our minds while we think about brains, entrails and internal organs as suitable dinner (egad, not breakfast and lunch, too?) fare. As Parkin opens this piece, "Will Harris's farmhands used to heave the entrails of butchered cattle and pigs into a compost heap on his farm in Bluffton, GA. Now grass-fed beef

heart, lamb tongue and pork ears are appearing on so many dinner plates he has started a waiting list for customers.”

Supply and demand are at work yet again, driven by contemporary market forces swiveling around our need for “natural” or “novelty” foods along with farmers’ recognition that offal sales represent a money making side venture. Parkin tells us that offal is a genuine “staple in the South and in some Hispanic, Asian and African-American communities.” Don’t tell me we’re not cutting edge in this area recently threatened by Hurricane Florence. If we’re tough enough to battle hurricanes, we’re surely hearty enough to face a hot steaming plate of deep fried pork brains. The real challenge may turn out to be what kind of wine to choose to best compliment this treat. (Yes, that was a trick question, the correct answer is obviously ice cold beer.)

**1. Can You Really Play College Football Sightless?** Jen Murphy penned an inspirational 9/10 essay on USC’s Jake Olson’s transformation from a relatively scrawny blind kid with a love of sports into a beefed up, heroic long snapper. He’s the lad who gets the nod from his coach to snap the football perfectly to his holder so the team’s kicker can make an extra point or field goal. Hard enough to pull this off skillfully when you’re fully sighted, a far more daunting challenge when you’re blind.

Olson entered the world with a rare variety of eye cancer which ultimately resulted in his loss of both eyes. He’s a big, strapping young man who won’t take no for an answer. Strapping now, that is, as in his early college years he was six feet four and 185 pounds. Olson benefited from major league support from his coaches and teammates as he practiced for long hours and ate endless rounds of body building meals. “I’m basically a quarterback, just throwing the ball through my legs. My shoulder and back muscles pull the ball through.”

No obvious devotee of negative calorie thinking, Mr. Olson favors his dinner above all other meals. He eats pasta practically every night, normally with fish and a vegetable. Combined with other meals that don’t seem to eschew carbs (or bacon at breakfast), Olson has gained a 50 solid pounds and has his sights trained on becoming a golfer as he completes his studies in business. Anyone care to hire this undaunted giant? The line starts here.

The Journal reported on 9/12 that despite Americans being advised to increase their consumption of carbs while avoiding fats, “Americans are sicker and fatter than ever.” Tell that to Jake Olson as he tees off on more spectacular feats which he can only feel.

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Food advice from *The Wall Street Journal*? Yeah, why not. It sure beats wandering through endless diet books and trying desperately to look like someone you will never be. In the meantime, please pass the braised beef heart and the (c'mon, gimee a break) fried entrails.

Bon appetit!