WILLIAM GRIMES, RUTH REICHL, & DAN BARBER

Appetite City: A Culinary History of New York

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LIVE from the New York Public Library

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Celeste Bartos Forum

MEG STEMMLER: Good evening. My name is Meg Stemmler. I produce programs of LIVE from the NYPL with the Director, Paul Holdengräber. One of the missions of Paul Holdengräber, in addition to making the lions roar, is to create cognitive theater. It has been quite a theatrical season so far, with evenings presented on hallucinations with Oliver Sacks, dance with William Forsythe, opera with Peter Gelb, disaster with Rebecca

Solnit, Capitalism and Its Future with Indra Nooyi and Niall Ferguson, and many others. And there is more to come. On Monday we will have Wes Anderson in conversation with Noah Baumbach about the film *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. On November 12, we welcome another great filmmaker, Volker Schlondörff, for a conversation with Kati Marton, and we will end the season with an evening with the Velvet Underground.

I invite you to tune into video and audio from these programs on the NYPL Web site. LIVE is also featured on Flavorpill, Daily Beast, Facebook, and Twitter. Please consider supporting these programs and your library by becoming a Friend. For just forty dollars, your Friends membership will get you discounted tickets for all LIVE from the NYPL programs, as well as discounts on books. You can visit the information table on your way out to join.

In 2002, Paul LeClerc, President of the New York Public Library, called William Grimes to ask him if he would be interested in developing an exhibition from the Menu Collection to let the public know about the rich materials that are available within these walls. William Grimes was, in fact, very interested and went on to curate New York Eats, an exhibition that included 255 menus, photographs, prints, magazine covers, and other items drawn from the 25,000 vintage menus in the Library's collection. Some special menus from our vast collection are featured here tonight. If you haven't yet had a chance to see them, Michael Inman, Curator of Rare Books at the NYPL, and Jessica Pigza, Librarian, the Rare Books Division, will be by the display cases and available for questions after the program.

It is a pleasure tonight to welcome back William Grimes to the New York Public Library for a discussion on his newest book, *Appetite City: The Culinary History of New York*, and take us on an historical tour of the city's dining culture with writer and editor Ruth Reichl and restaurant owner and chef Dan Barber. We would like to thank tonight's corporate sponsor, Southwest Airlines, for making this possible.

William Grimes was the restaurant critic for the *New York Times* from 1999 to 2003. He is the author of *Straight Up or on the Rocks* and *My Fine Feathered Friends* and the coauthor of the *New York Times Guide to the New York City Restaurants 2004*. He was named *New York Times* obituary writer in 2008. Ruth Reichl was the editor in chief of *Gourmet* magazine for ten years. Her books include *Mmmmmm: A Feastiary*, *Tender at the Bone*, *Comfort Me with Apples*, and *Garlic and Sapphires*. Dan Barber opened Blue Hill at Stone Barns and Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture in 2004 and is the restaurant's chef and owner and the Center's creative director.

After the discussion, we will have an audience Q and A. Please come to the standing mic which will be in front of the stage. It's important to emphasize that you do indeed ask questions rather than make statements or lengthy comments. LIVE is proud to be in partnership with our independent bookseller, 192 Books. Tonight, 192 will be selling books by both William Grimes and Ruth Reichl and both authors will be signing after the program.

Before Rebecca Federman, our culinary collections librarian, comes to speak about the menu collection, we will show you an animated clip created by our artist in residence, Flash Rosenberg. Flash draws the conversations between authors and speakers in real time. She traces how ideas might look as they mingle in the room and land on us while our minds are actively participating. Flash will be in the back of the room drawing tonight's conversation. Since our focus is on food, we hope you will enjoy this conversational portrait titled *A Day at ElBulli*, featuring Ferran Adrià in conversation with Harold McGee and Corby Kummer.

(animation plays)

REBECCA FEDERMAN: Good evening. My name is Rebecca Federman and I'm the Culinary Collections librarian here at the New York Public Library and I just want to take a few minutes to tell you a little bit about our culinary collection. Tonight the theme of the panel discussion is on restaurant culture in New York City, and there is really no better place to have this conversation than the New York Public Library. The Library's menu collection began before this building was even built, and today, with nearly forty thousand menus in our collection, dating back to the 1840s and continuing to the present day, the library's goal is to collect and secure these ephemeral documents for safekeeping and make them available to anyone who needs to consult them. As someone who has worked with the collection, I'm always amazed with how often these items are used and consulted by graduate students, scholars, fiction writers, and food enthusiasts. The menus have an ability to answer a question that isn't necessarily easy to answer and that's what

were people eating, socially, at least, in 1866 or 1916 or 1986? But their value extends beyond food and also informs neighborhood development and social history.

We have the menu from Restaurant Florent, for example, because the Meatpacking District today looks very different than it did in 1985 when the restaurant opened. We have the menu from the French Pavilion of the 1939 World's Fair, because how can one study the infamous Le Pavilion without referencing its predecessor? And we have the restaurant for Diner in Williamsburg, because who knows how people will use these menus in the future.

But menus aren't the only culinary related material we have here. As you all know, *Gourmet*'s last issue was released this month and for nearly seventy years, *Gourmet* was the food publication covering food trends, highlighting travel destinations, interviewing chefs. The library has the full print run of *Gourmet*, along with a host of large and small food periodicals, like *Saveur* and *Cooks Illustrated*, but also smaller ones like *Swallow* magazine and *The Kosher Kettle*. Our collection of cookbooks dates back to the fifteenth century and continues to the present. In addition to other food-related materials related to everything from crops and raising cattle to cheese making.

A few years ago William Grimes curated an exhibition on the third floor of this building called New York Eats Out and it celebrated New Yorkers' enthusiasm for dining outside of the home. Mr. Grimes created an historical narrative that began with Delmonico's in the nineteenth century and continued to September 11 and Windows on the World. The

first time I ever set foot in this building was to see that exhibition and I'm so happy he's here along with Ruth Reichl and Dan Barber, because together they contribute so much to the culinary excellence of this city. So please join me in welcoming William Grimes, Ruth Reichl, and Dan Barber.

(applause)

DAN BARBER: I'm going to take a minute to say hello to you. We've never met.

WILLIAM GRIMES: Finally, in the flesh. You know, it's funny, when you review restaurants you avoid these people and then you get the chance later on to meet the hand behind the food and the mind behind the food, so it's always, you know—you get a second life out of it in a way. I have to say, just starting, because of that introduction having to do with the menu collection, that, you know, many books are born in the New York Public Library. Innumerable—beyond our ability to count, but mine might have the closest connection to the Library of all of them, because it really began with that phone call from Paul LeClerc six years ago, seven years ago, inviting me to the plunge into the menu collection, which I knew of and had written about a little bit for the *Times* and welcomed the opportunity to get back into it and really get my hands into those boxes. It was fun to do that exhibition and out of that exhibition came the idea that perhaps a narrative could be constructed that would allow us—a kind of a time machine of the kind that I've always fantasized about—what if I could turn the dial and go back to 1909 and dine in New York? What were people eating in 1840 and what did it feel like to be in the

city? I— often when I look at photographs of the city and watch just people in bowler hats walking around, I would think, well, where are they going to eat lunch, and what is that lunch going to be and what is it going to feel like?

So this book was an extended indulgence for me in that little fantasy trip, decade by decade through the city's history and it was full of surprises for me, because I must say that an enormous amount of it was simply unknown to anyone at the time I started researching it. It just lay locked up in the vaults, so to speak, in magazine articles and in newspaper articles, gathering dust, and like the tomb of Tutankhamen, waited and waited through the years until somebody opened the stone door, and little did I know how hard it was going to be to nudge that door and get in there and find out what had been happening in New York all these decades ago.

Now, we are in sacred ground not just because we are in the Library, but two blocks away from here, to the north, were two of the great restaurants in the City, Sherry's and Delmonico's. They faced off against each other on 44th and 5th, these two dinosaurs of haute cuisine in New York. By the 1890s they'd moved up to 44th Street and were the colossi in the city's culinary culture. And here we are. At the time they moved, the library wasn't even here. It was—if you read *The Alienist*, you may recall that final scene where they run around the top of Croton reservoir, or aqueduct, I don't know what it was—you see it in the pictures, those big fortress-like walls. That was what was here before the library was, and there, two blocks away were these two great restaurants. And, Ruth, I understand that you have a connection to one of these restaurants, Sherry's.

RUTH REICHL: Well, I was fortunate enough to have my Aunt Birdie, who lived to be a hundred and two and lived alone at the end of her life, and never left New York City, so she remembered people talking about the Civil War, and she remembered being taken to Sherry's as a little girl, or I don't know if it was a real memory or she was just talking about her father talking about Sherry's, but right before she died in 1980 I did a sort of culinary interview with her where I asked her about all the food that she'd eaten as a child, and she'd literally, had never gone more than two hundred miles away from New York, so her talking about restaurants was much like your book, it's this gradual moving north. You know, everybody sort of starts downtown, then, as she remembered when they moved from the Lower East Side up to the country, which was Harlem, where they had a backyard and chickens, but one of the things that she talked about was these incredible meals at Sherry's.

WILLIAM GRIMES: That is mind-boggling to hear from an actual living voice, because when you're looking at these menus, the hell of it is you can't eat the food. I mean, all you can do is you can look at it, you can note it, and you can read people enthusing over it, but like opera performances from the mid- to late nineteenth century, until the advent of any kind of sound recording, you can only wonder what those great voices sounded like—what were those meals like, what did those ingredients really taste like? There was a third restaurant near here, and this is my little pop quiz for Dan, which is there is a third restaurant, and you will get enormous bonus points if you are able to tell me anything about this.

DAN BARBER: Do I get another star from you?

(laughter)

WILLIAM GRIMES: We don't do retroactive stars—sometimes we don't even do them the first time around. The—I wish to read to you this statement of a philosophy: "My theory about a restaurant is that to be the right sort of an eating place, it must be closely related to its source of supplies." When do you think that might have been uttered, and do you have any idea who might have said it?

DAN BARBER: I was going to say, I thought I said that last week. **(laughter)** That's not the right answer. So who would have said it? You know, that's a tough one.

WILLIAM GRIMES: If you know, I'll fall off my chair.

RUTH REICHL: I know.

DAN BARBER: You know. I'm going to give you the proprietor of the restaurant that this person owned, is that fair? Did the person own the restaurant, a restaurant?

WILLIAM GRIMES: Yes, this person did.

DAN BARBER: Do you know the answer?

RUTH REICHL: I do.

DAN BARBER: I'm going to guess the Craftsman.

RUTH REICHL: You're right.

WILLIAM GRIMES: Oh, my God.

(applause)

RUTH REICHL: You have to fall off your chair now.

WILLIAM GRIMES: I should eat the flowers in the vase or something.

DAN BARBER: Well, I'm going to ask you a question back.

WILLIAM GRIMES: I'm going to explain to you what the Craftsman Restaurant is in a second.

RUTH REICHL: You have to mention who owned it, because that's important.

WILLIAM GRIMES: Now, the Craftsman restaurant was on 39th Street and 5th. I opened in 1912 or ’13, I have to look it up in my own book again. Gustav Stickley was the owner, and you know him I’m sure as the great furniture designer. He created—there was a Craftsman Building and it was intended to be a showcase, office, headquarters, for the Stickley enterprise. It was furniture throughout most of the building. And then way at the top was something called the Craftsman Restaurant, and the thing about this restaurant that anticipates what Dan does here now among us is it had its own farm. Stickley—he was not a restaurateur, but he had ideas about the good life and the civilized pursuit of pleasure, and he felt that in the area of food what that meant was resistance to an industrialized food economy. It meant fresh ingredients on the table. It meant ice—he actually made ice cubes from ice that was from spring water on the farm—

DAN BARBER: See, I’d be maligned if I did that today—

WILLIAM GRIMES: The fruit, the vegetables, the flowers—all this came—and of course the design was very different from—restaurants were very ponderous in those days, and they tended to be—if you wanted to communicate luxuriousness in a restaurant, or that this is a high-class restaurant, you did it with a lot of heavy dark wood and gloom, and this was something that he knew how to sort of take the stuffing out of all of that and created a very modern-looking restaurant, and I’m gratified that you know all about it.

DAN BARBER: What I’m struck by with your book, besides the writing, which, you know, I’ve always—I couldn’t say this when you were, you know, a reviewer for the

Times. Your writing is amazing—I felt that very strongly when you were a reviewer, and I was reminded of it in reading this book, because it's so fluid, it is not showy writing, and you pack so much information into a paragraph. I mean, it's amazing when you have—I don't know how many of you in this audience have read the book. It is amazing the depth of information that's I was going to say thrown at you, but it's not thrown at you, it's sort of lovingly prepared for you, and it really is a joy to read and, you know, a great writer at work, so that's a), my—

But second I'm struck by is that—is the description of today's New York dining scene or let's say culinary scene, so you would take like the explosion of food carts, you would look at the explosion of cultural diversity, you would look at restaurant as theater, which feels very much like a new thing, which is to say in my lifetime anyway. You would look at the restaurant as, you know, the cult of the new ideal, the new trend, you would look at it for the desire to become, to visit a restaurant that had a more bohemian aesthetic. All of these things describe today's New York culinary experience, and yet you describe New York culinary experience at the turn of the century, the turn of the last century, very much in the same way. I'm so struck by that. It reminds me that—well, what you just said, is that I have no new ideas, and that there really are no new ideas, that they're rehashing of old ones, whether we know it or not, so I guess—You wrote me an e-mail last night about the overall trend, the overall question of your book was: were they were eating better than we are today? And so with that in mind I ask you, because I could not get that from your book, and I don't know if you even fully answered it. Maybe you want to answer it now.

WILLIAM GRIMES: It's an imponderable, I think, as an act of faith, just sort of understanding what was available in the markets. And keep in mind, the markets in New York, and this is its own subject. The markets in New York were enormous. I mean, we always kind of fantasize about Paris, and Les Halles, this vast central market, and how wonderful that is. Well, New York had two markets. The market we have today, the Greenmarket in Union Square, is a mere postage stamp in comparison to the size of the Fulton Market and the Washington Market, which covered the East Side and the West Side, these were vast cities within the city. And literally thousands of food vendors would be selling produce, game, fish—you could also get things like shoelaces and novels and anything else—they were kind of, you know, supermarkets tacked on to vast food markets and when you go down the list of what they were selling there, what was available just in terms of raw products, you think, boy, I mean, when's the last time you saw snipe, plover, and woodcock on the menu?

RUTH REICHL: Well, I mean, that's the other thing that just drives you crazy when you're reading the book is you just realize like—we just—we ate it all, they gobbled it all up and they didn't leave it. **(laughter)** I mean, you know, the oysters, which were, the oyster beds were vast—

WILLIAM GRIMES: If you read down it's a list of the dead, really. It's a roll call of illustrious ancestors with names like Shrewsbury and Saddlerock. These were oysters that were sort of at the top of the menu in these restaurants in the 1880s and the 1890s and all

of them are just forgotten names. I mean, we have a couple of New York oysters that we still love, like Blue Points, and those were on the menu back then, but all the rest of them are gone, and just as you say, we gobbled it all up. We shot them, we ate them, we fished them, we consumed them, and now we lament them.

DAN BARBER: Well, do you think that—I mean, there is this sort of running theme in your book of excess, whether it's a steakhouse or a lobster house or whatever the theme is. Do you—what do you attribute that to? I mean, is it—is that an American experience? Is that New York experience? Is that a result of the incredible ecological availability of everything that surrounded New York? What do you—

WILLIAM GRIMES: We're positioned in a lucky way—just as a harbor, New York is in a very lucky location, and that's why it is—one reason why it's the great city it is, and people don't think about it because the industrialization has proceeded apace and we don't think about the fact that, as a natural setting, it's a beautiful—in its natural state, it's an abundant producer of everything, or was—I mean, the New Jersey Meadowlands, they were called Meadowlands for a reason, you know. All that marsh and wetland, they supported just these vast flocks of birds that don't exist. Prancing deer on 86th Street, in the woods there.

RUTH REICHL: But there's another reason. I mean, I think one of the reasons that there was so much excess is we're a nation of immigrants, and very poor people came here, and as they made money one of the ways that they reveled in their newfound wealth

was just to eat as much as they could. I mean, they were people who came from starving villages and were thinking about their families they'd left behind and suddenly, you know—they ate meat maybe twice a year, and suddenly they could eat meat everyday and why not eat a lot of it?

DAN BARBER: It's amazing how trends continue.

(laughter)

WILLIAM GRIMES: In some ways you get a false idea at the top end—because you tend to see banquet menus, and you get a slightly exaggerated sense of what people were eating, because, you know, Delmonico's 365 days a year would just make fortunes by doing this banquets in these private halls, or private dining rooms, and if you actually what—sort of what a typical meal might be, it wasn't quite that excessive. But they ate heavy, and they—you know, when people went to restaurants like that they ate a lot, and when they went to the little cheap restaurants they ate a lot, too. I mean, these little fifty-cent table d'hôtes that the Italians—Italian immigrants set up down in the Village after they displaced the French. Soho used to be French, you know, before it had cast iron, the Cast-iron District, it was an intensely French neighborhood with all sorts of little bistros, sort of from Washington Square south, and with the 1890s the French start dispersing, and the Italians take their place, and a lot of times they'd set up a boardinghouse and the street level would be a restaurant, and what they thought—they thought they were going

to be serving Italian laborers, and they ended up all these hipsters discovered these fifty-cent table d'hôtes where you could get—really six, seven courses for that fifty cents.

DAN BARBER: A question—this is a Larry King softball because I got a teaser for you coming up. But the question was, are we eating better today than we were a hundred years ago. What's your gut telling you?

WILLIAM GRIMES: I think that—I fantasize that we ate better a hundred years ago simply because the raw material was better and more abundant and more varied.

RUTH REICHL: And it came from closer.

DAN BARBER: But taking the other side of that, there was bad distribution, even from local sources, there was a lack of refrigeration, right? I mean, you know, today, you can pick up the phone or I can pick up the phone and get anything I want from anywhere in the world, for a fairly good price. Often the quality is quite good. How to compare that with what was available from the Meadowlands, I don't know, but, you know, there's some luxuries today that are quite efficient and quite abundant, so I don't know where you—

WILLIAM GRIMES: Well, hygiene is another thing. I often think that you had to be a brave soul to step up to a street cart and get a half-dozen oysters on the half-shell, and I think probably many people fell by the wayside, but you know, sacrificed in a good

cause, **(laughter)** the other thing that I often thought of was how inventive were these restaurants and chefs and the answer is "invention" wasn't really a word that people applied to cuisine at the time. What they tried to do in French restaurants was faithfully—at the high end—faithfully reproduce classic pre-Escoffier French cuisine, as well as they were able to given the limitations in the United States. I mean, you know, that's—to an extent that's still true, you know, if you're trying to make a perfect French restaurant outside of French, you start with a couple steps, you start with a demerit or a couple steps behind. And with ethnic restaurants, again, it was not trying to invent something new and exciting and innovative, they're trying to recreate what they came with, you know, the soul food that they came with.

DAN BARBER: Your book reminded me of how awful it would have been to be a chef, even with the abundance, is that the—the—how do I say it, the power, the power of food creation was in the hands of the diner. The diner came to the restaurant and expected a certain listing of dishes for which you were famous or known, and came with sort of a pre-idea of what they were going to eat even before they arrived at the restaurant—

RUTH REICHL: Well, I don't think that's true, because I mean the book pretty much makes clear that when Delmonico's started, they offered a completely new menu and people were thrilled and excited by it.

DAN BARBER: I was going to say there was a real shift, and especially as you note, I think you note it, in the shift with nouvelle cuisine, where the chefs came out from the

kitchen and there was this tectonic shift, where you didn't arrive at a restaurant—we just watched Ferran Adrià, we see how the evolution has really—where we've come to. But back in the '60s, that was a revolution, that was the Ferran Adriàs of the day. You know, you've written about this, I've talked to you about it before. That this is—this was the shift from the diner having the power over the food to the chef, and today we're at a whole never level of that, but it was really interesting to see that evolution, and I—the idea of creativity back at the turn of the last century was very limited.

WILLIAM GRIMES: Yeah. And the décor was often extremely stilted—the language of interior decoration, until you got to this crazy restaurant called Murray's Roman Gardens, on 42nd Street, which was this insane fantasy by a very little-known architect named Henry Milo Erkins, who combined a Syrian/Egyptian/Roman everything into one very bizarre restaurant. It was the first theme restaurant in New York—there was kind of a Cleopatra barge parked next to a table on the grand sort of ballroom or dining room on the ground floor and there was a couple stories up was the Dragon Room, which was an Oriental-themed thing, with some kind of a re-creation of the Imperial Gardens in Peking and it had an electric railway that ran around it and delivered food to each place on this train **(laughter)** and there was, you know, no—I don't know *what* got into this guy, but they went on this, this little team, he and the owner of the restaurant, Murray, went on to create something called the Café de l'Opera, the Opera Café, a couple of blocks away and that was even grander and weirder and lasted only about a year, but other than that, these splashy big restaurants were kind of boring in the interiors. It took a while until you got sort of European modernism breaking the mold and color and spatial differentiation and

different levels within restaurants, the idea of intimate spaces breaking up big open spaces. They kind of looked like big assembly halls with ranks of tables in the nineteenth century—rather forbidding.

DAN BARBER: Ruth, the role of the journalist in all of this. What's your having read the book, what do you feel, or your own understanding of New York journalism and across the country—how the role of the writer, the reviewer, the writer about food, how did this help evolve what's being described?

RUTH REICHL: Well, it's such a new role. Craig Claiborne pretty much invented restaurant criticism as we know it and you know it wasn't that long ago, I mean, I guess you could talk about Duncan Hines before that, but it's a very new role. You know, people went where was convenient. And, you know, I think that the role of the journalist has been hugely important, because it sort of brings the idea of food and different kinds of food into your home, and suddenly you're sitting there in the morning and you're reading about some new kind of food, and I think that—I mean, you talk a lot about Joe Baum's influence in New York.

DAN BARBER: By the way—amazing chapter. It was just incredible to see—I knew about Joe Baum, but I just did not understand. Again, that he really, as you said it, you said it perfectly, that everything after that is sort of an imitation of what he was doing.

RUTH REICHL: But I remember being a little kid and having my mother read these reviews in the *Times* about Joe Baum's restaurant and saying, "we have to go," you know, and being taken to La Fonda del Sol, and the Forum of the Twelve Caesars and the Four Seasons. And just because she'd read about it. I mean, her friends weren't going there. And so, you know, I don't think you can underestimate how important writing about restaurants has been to the evolution of the really modern restaurant.

WILLIAM GRIMES: When you were talking about the shift of power to the chef, I was immediately thinking exactly along these lines, and *Gourmet* was seminal in all of this, by the way, that for one thing, Craig Claiborne, you know, kind of cut his teeth, eyeteeth, working at *Gourmet*. He was a kind of combination flunky and did a column called Along the Boulevards, which was little capsule reviews of New York restaurants.

RUTH REICHL: And we actually still have cards in the library written in his hand.

WILLIAM GRIMES: So that was like his lucky little, you know, fresh out of hotel school job at *Gourmet* and then he translated—you know, he went on to bigger things, which is, as you say, essentially creating at least newspaper food journalism and from that comes this, you know—the Food Network and the power to create star chefs. Before that chefs were laborers in the kitchen and they were—their identity was deliberately kept secret. I mean, the people you knew were the maître-d or the owner of the restaurant, or the waiter, you had the relationship, and these waiters would be at these restaurants forever.

RUTH REICHL: If I may—except for at Gourmet. Gourmet always had it was "Our Chef," and the first chef there was Louis Diat.

WILLIAM GRIMES: Yes, he was one of the first names who became recognizable to the public.

DAN BARBER: What year?

RUTH REICHL: The man who invented vichyssoise.

WILLIAM GRIMES: Vichyssoise, and he was also famous for turkey hash.

RUTH REICHL: This was in the forties, but he had been the chef at the Ritz in New York and they made a big point of "Our Chef," and after Louis Diat was the wonderfully named Louis P. Degouy.

WILLIAM GRIMES: But if you go before then, just to show how primitive food journalism was—it wasn't until 1903 that there was an actual restaurant guide for New York. It's *Where and How to Dine in New York*. It's in this collection here, or actually you can go online and read it, because it's profusely illustrated. You can go to archive.org, which is—I don't quite know what it is, they download books or they scan obscure books and this is one of them, and you can see what the restaurant scene was

like, at least at the higher end, in 1903. Well, there wasn't another guide until 1925, when the architecture critic for the *New Yorker* decided to moonlight and he wrote a book called *The Restaurants of New York*. Of course, it was 1925, Prohibition had kicked in and was in full force. And the beginning of it was just this lament for the demise of all these restaurants that had gone down just kicking and screaming in a matter of a couple of years, Murray's Roman Gardens among them, which became a flea circus, **(laughter)** and eventually, at the very end of its life, I think in the sixties and seventies, it was a gay baths, where the décor finally made sense, you know. **(laughter)** But the idea of restaurants as a subject and food as a subject of interest to a cultivated readership, that really didn't exist and it took a—it was just incredibly slow to come along. It's really surprising, given our infatuation with this topic today.

DAN BARBER: And where do you see the future here, looking down the pike, what do you see as the influence of food journalism for New York, beyond, or do you—

RUTH REICHL: I don't think that you, you know, grow up eating great food and then one day turn around and say, "now I'm going to eat junk for the rest of my life." I mean, I think, you know, once you become a food culture, as long as you can sustain it economically, you only get, like, more and more discerned. And I'm very optimistic about the future of food in this country—

DAN BARBER: Thank you. That's good to hear.

WILLIAM GRIMES: Food has a future, well that's good.

DAN BARBER: Better for me, Bill Grimes.

WILLIAM GRIMES: Better for you, better for me.

RUTH REICHL: But you know what I wanted to talk about a little bit, one of the things that I really love about your book is you see the changing social role of the restaurant and you know it's like one of the things that—I never thought about—women couldn't go to restaurants.

WILLIAM GRIMES: It was a tough town for women for a long, long time. And one of the heroes—one of the heroes of the book is a woman named Alice Foote MacDougall, who in the 1920s took pity on the working woman who was entering the workforce in ever greater numbers, in you know all those steno pools and typists and in Newspaper Row more and more women were getting employed, but when they went out at lunchtime to try to find a place to eat, they found these grubby hole-in-the-wall places that journalists loved—male journalists loved and lived on for—and sentimentalized about in later years—fortunately, because that was prime material for me. But it was a very forbidding atmosphere for women. The food—The hygiene was highly suspect, and Alice Foote MacDougall, a very genteel woman left destitute when her husband died, started out with a couple dollars in her pocket and became a coffee roaster, and decided to open some coffee shops, and parlayed that. She became the Martha Stewart of her day. And

what she understood was women like her were looking for a little, a lighter kind of food, portions not as large, and surroundings that were not disgusting. **(laughter)** Sometimes it's just one little insight—

DAN BARBER: Women, God, they want everything.

(laughter)

WILLIAM GRIMES: One little insight can make you a fortune, and it made her a fortune. She saw her poor—her assistant was a young woman. And she noticed that she was eating a slice of apple pie that she bought on the street and a cup of coffee because she didn't want to go into any of these horrible places. She decided, "I gotta create something that a woman could stand to go to." And an empire was born.

One of the great breakthroughs was just allowing women to smoke, which Café Martin in 1908, on Madison Square, kind of the coolest French restaurant of its day. Stanford White ate there the night he got shot to death, and that was—one New Year's they decided they were going to allow women to smoke. They'd been sneaking cigarettes behind fans for years, but this was going to be wide open. And but otherwise, you know, you would—you would find restaurants, either there was separate dining facilities for women or women simply were not allowed, although the picture sort of varied depending on neighborhood and what the proprietor, you know, the philosophy of the proprietor and so on. But it was difficult.

RUTH REICHL: But there was also—I remember the clothing barrier for women. I mean, I was—my parents took me to Côte Basque for my sixteenth birthday and they wouldn't let me in because I was wearing a pantsuit.

WILLIAM GRIMES: Oh, right, the crisis of the pantsuit. Although I didn't write about this, I do recall, there were some real major showdowns between diplomats' wives in pantsuits, very formidable women in pantsuits staring down equally formidable maître d's, and you know one of the great cultural moments in the city. Of course that and all other aspects of dress code have kind of gone the California way **(laughter)** and there's—I think maybe 21 Club is the only place left where they hand you the jacket and make you put it on. Otherwise—as a reviewer I was always appalled at going to a three-star, four-star restaurant and seeing some slob in a tracksuit **(laughter)** and usually sitting—

DAN BARBER: You and me both, man.

WILLIAM GRIMES: Sitting with his girlfriend who had dressed up for the occasion and I felt very, very sorry for the girl who had dressed up for the date and then this guy in this sweatshirt.

DAN BARBER: Did the research for the book, especially the last section of the book is about the run-up to where we are today, especially from the 1980s on, also really

brilliantly synthesized into these broad themes, which was a real pleasure to read. Even though I knew a lot of the information, a lot of it also was new and fresh, and you did it beautifully. I'm wondering did it make you want to get back into writing about food and did you miss the days of the power you wielded? **(laughter)** Actually you wield another kind of power now, which has a very lasting effect.

(laughter)

WILLIAM GRIMES: Yes, I do have the last word now, let me tell you, **(laughter)** because you don't get two obituaries. You can get two reviews. Like Prospero, I laid down my scepter. I don't regret it because I get to watch so much TV now. I do regret eating at someone else's expense at very fine restaurants, whereas now I have to think twice or thrice about walking into some of the places I'd might like to eat out at. And it was—in some ways it's the best job in the world, there's no getting around it. And there's no way you can inspire sympathy when you talk about how hard it is to go out there night after night. **(laughter)** The foie gras fatigue and all of that. **(laughter)** People just look at you like they want to hit you. It's, you know, about five years is, I thought, just about enough of doing that, and so I don't really have any regrets about that.

As far as food writing goes, I mean, I felt like I was doing plenty of it when I was doing this book, in fact for me it was some of the most fun food writing, because I was satisfying—I was scratching an itch, which was that sort of time-travel lust to go back and figure out what people were—what was the city like before I got here? A hundred

years before I got here? And what did it feel like? And sometimes I describe this as being sort of like *The Alienist*, except everybody gets to sit down and eat, so there was a romance to the whole endeavor that I found gratifying.

DAN BARBER: Well, Ruth, I have to say what I know most of the people in this room are thinking and what I have not yet said to you which is I am very sorry about the end of *Gourmet*. We are—I am, I'll speak personally—I am forever grateful for everything you did to that magazine and for everything you've given to the food world of New York and beyond. You're both an inspiration to me and me and a lot of home cooks are grateful and deeply appreciative, and so for that we give a round of applause. **(applause)** So I'll just ask, What are you up to? What are you thinking about? Where are we going to see you in a few years?

RUTH REICHL: Well, I'm still on book tour for *Gourmet Today*. We have two more books in the can that I'll probably finish—two more little *Gourmet* books. I've just finished the first season of *Gourmet's Adventures with Ruth*, and I think there will be a second season and I think that our other TV show, *Diary of a Foodie*, will go on, and I'm mostly going to be writing.

DAN BARBER: One of the losses of *Gourmet*, there's been tons of talk about the quality of the magazine also the quality of the writing, which, you know, was—was led by Ruth, really, and she with her standards and the keen eye, editorial eye, brought *Gourmet* to a new level of writing, which, sort of on a personal level, again, is just the greatest loss of

that magazine, because it provided a void that's really out there, so will be very missed. But we also—and I know this all too well, you were going to go on and do things that affect my world only for the better, so I'm looking forward to—

RUTH REICHL: I want to say, a lot of people, a lot of us at *Gourmet* got notes from people. But you were really special. You wrote notes to so many people, and it was like—you know, I mean, usually it was one or two of us would get a note from someone, but Dan really reached out to a lot of people at the magazine.

DAN BARBER: I felt so moved, you've done a lot for me. It's a real love fest up here as you can tell. **(laughter)** Should we open this up to some questions?

WILLIAM GRIMES: Yeah, I think at a certain point—

DAN BARBER: Maybe I pulled the trigger on that too early, I don't know.

WILLIAM GRIMES: Though, usually, there tend to be a lot of questions and never enough time.

DAN BARBER: That's right

WILLIAM GRIMES: The problem is it's so dark—

DAN BARBER: I've got this X-ray—if anyone wants to pop up a hand we can start this. Can you stand up and just belt it out and we'll—

Q: (Inaudible)

DAN BARBER: Did everyone in the back hear that? It's a great question. Do you want to repeat the question?

WILLIAM GRIMES: Essentially it's why can't we reproduce all these—I'm complaining about not being able to taste all this food I'm reading about. Well, why can't we just reproduce it? Well, we know, we sort of know, we have the written score, but we don't know what the music was like. I think that's what I'm trying to get across, because we can certainly. If it's classic French cuisine, we know what the sauces were, and we know what the nuts and bolts of the dish were, but we don't know what the raw ingredients tasted like then, and that's more than a minor point. So, what did the tomatoes taste like, and what did the celery taste like, and what did those plover and woodcock taste like? I don't know that we can ever recapture all of that, so—

RUTH REICHL: I once listened to the most fascinating conversation between Edna Lewis and Marion Cunningham talking about how different things had tasted when they were children than they do today, and they were talking about ordinary ingredients, and it really made me feel like you can make those recipes, but you can't recapture those flavors.

DAN BARBER: I don't know that, you know, my temptation is to say exactly what Ruth said. And in fact I'm practicing my cuisine in part to recapture those, you know, lost flavors, but, you know, there's also a point at which that becomes just nostalgia, and so I'll answer the question I asked to Bill Grimes, "Were people eating better back then than today, were the pure tastes, the flavor of food better then," a very broad question, but I wonder if, you know, you wouldn't have tasted a lot of the food back then and not been as impressed as we tend to want to think we would be. In other words, there's a lot of great farming happening locally and nationally with a great sense of combining Old World wisdom of the turn of the last century, let's say, agriculturally speaking, and also utilizing innovative techniques and technology in both distribution from seed to distributor to marketer to chef, to chef really and the use of technology and ideas that I would suggest have vastly improved flavor in many ways. I don't want to make too broad a statement, but there is a sense of getting into this and thinking in a very nostalgic way—why can't we just go back to the way food once was? Well, in fact, I think probably the way to move forward for better flavor, and this was something that I think *Gourmet* captured perfectly, is to marry both Old World wisdom and new technologies.

Because to suggest that, you know, which I get a lot, is somebody comes up and says "my grandfather used to farm you know, like you're talking about, you know, organically without pesticides." I was like, "no he didn't, I don't want to say that to you, but no he didn't. He might have farmed without pesticides and chemical fertilizers because they weren't readily available, but he probably was not a very good farmer," and there's tons

of recorded data about that and there's even more today to show that there is an approach to agriculture, to farming, that has far surpassed what our nostalgia begs us to believe.

RUTH REICHL: Well, I think there is for farming, but, for instance, my neighbor who is a hunter upstate brought me some little teal ducks. You can't buy them, and it was the most delicious duck I have ever tasted—I mean, it is not—it doesn't taste remotely like any farm duck. It just doesn't.

DAN BARBER: Right.

WILLIAM GRIMES: When you think about it, if you can translate it to wine. This conversation comes up a lot in terms of wine and I think it—I think you can sometimes focus on it more easily. There was a lot of horrible, bad wine made around in France a century ago and your chances of getting, I think the low bar got moved just a lot higher by technology. It's very easy to get a drinkable, you know, low-level bottle of wine. Easier today than at any time in history. I mean, it doesn't hurt to understand what's going on in the barrel, and that stuff can be trans—you know, technology can be misused, and you can have these kind of horribly Parkerized wines that people complain about, but you also have this whole world.

DAN BARBER: He's free to say that—

(laughter)

WILLIAM GRIMES: This whole world of wine's available to us today from Chile and Australia, produced with a very sophisticated technological understanding of winemaking, and that has to at least offset some of the laments you have of the old Burgundy, the little farmer in Burgundy.

DAN BARBER: Great point. You're at the mic.

Q: I've been instructed.

DAN BARBER: Yeah, take it away.

Q: With all of that history in mind that you've researched and you're all talking about—

DAN BARBER: You've got to speak up—

Q: This is terrifying. And what it says about us, what history says about us as eaters. What do each of you make of the trend right now toward tater tots and hot dogs and fried chicken and the sort of thing that's going on right now, this kind of TV dinner sort of simple food trend. What do you think?

DAN BARBER: So the question is what is our reaction to this trend that the questioner has proposed about processed food, cheapened food that is so readily available and abundant. Maybe we should start with you.

WILLIAM GRIMES: Well, you're asking about sort of a retro trend toward an idealization of—you know, the self-consciously consumed tater tot in a fine restaurant setting or are you talking about just you know really awful TV dinners that we all agree are horrible in every way.

Q: The idealized retro trend.

WILLIAM GRIMES: The idealized retro trend. Well, it can be fun and it can be hugely annoying. I remember trashing Hudson Cafeteria and I'm doubly glad—

DAN BARBER: Boy, I remember that, too. Wow.

WILLIAM GRIMES: Having been sort of slammed on by the owner, Jeffrey Chodorow, I'm really happy that I completely stomped on this place, **(laughter)** but it was a shrine of retro chic and the idealization of really bad chop suey and all these other things and if they could have served you a TV dinner on a tray they would have done it, and it was—you know, you can only get so far imagining your food in quotes, and eventually you have to put it in your mouth and eat it, and it's not so much fun then.

RUTH REICHL: I mean, I just think, you know, it's what you expect to have happen in a recession where suddenly everybody wants to be comforted by the food, and I think that ultimately you realize that it's *not* comforting, it's just *annoying*, and you go away from it. I think that it's this idea that people have in their heads that if they go to the, you know, the food of their childhood, they will somehow feel better, and then they go to it and they just feel worse.

DAN BARBER: Other questions. Yes.

Q: (Inaudible)

RUTH REICHL: (laughs) Are you referring to the article I wrote in the *New York Times* right before I left? I wrote an article, which probably got more angry mail than anything else I'd ever written, which was I went with my family, my large extended family, my brother and his three children and all their kids and my husband and my son, and there were nineteen of us and we rented this great big house in Provence and I had this fantasy that I was going to be cooking fabulous food every day, and this is a while ago, I mean, I've, it was before I left the *Times*, and I left there more than ten years ago, but the truth was that the food that was available to me was not great, and I was going to these farmers' markets and getting sort of food that had been brought from everywhere, and I found shopping there really difficult. I mean, if you wanted to get meat, you would have to drive to a butcher in one place and then you'd have to drive twenty-five miles to

get the great cheese someplace else, and the bread in the little village that we were in was inedible and Pat Wells has barely spoken to me since this piece came out.

But I think things are much better now, but there really was a point in France where they were losing their food, where the quality of the food in France just went away and in fact, years ago, and this is maybe fifteen years ago, I did a piece about Kermit Lynch, the wine importer who lived half the year in Berkeley and half the year in his house in Provence and he said it was far easier to be a better cook in Berkeley, where the quality of the products was so high, than it was in Provence. And so I ended up saying, you know, that this—these few weeks we spent there felt like a year because it was so disappointing.

(laughter)

DAN BARBER: Other questions—

WILLIAM GRIMES: This reminds me—you were on the radio talking with André Soltner and it just flashed through my mind, his remark that I just have never gotten over, he said when he opened the restaurant the only fresh herb you could get in New York was parsley, and my jaw dropped and it's sort of stayed dropped ever since.

RUTH REICHL: I mean, I used to do—When I first was in California doing interviews with chefs—there wasn't any—really, there were no herbs, there were no local cheeses. I mean, it's hard to remember how fast things have changed.

WILLIAM GRIMES: The early eighties, even, it was different. I talked with Alfred Portale at Gotham Bar and Grill in connection with this book, and he was reminiscing about scrambling to get all these things you take for granted now. Just having to stitch together any kind of little, you know, what we're talking about, something beyond parsley or fish that was just not supermarket flounder. They had—there's a lot of just on-the-spur invention and creation of little midget companies that would go out and get this stuff and make it available to chefs, and there's just been a revolution in the last twenty years, twenty-five years.

Q: You've talked about restaurants in Manhattan in the 1880s, the 1890s, and I was curious about the state of restaurants in Manhattan during the Depression and how the Depression affected them, and certainly given, you know, where we are today.

WILLIAM GRIMES: Well, the Depression was—keep in mind that Prohibition had dealt the first huge blow to New York dining. It was an annihilating event. It erased a century of progress in a matter of months. And the Depression—Prohibition was still on when the Depression started, so you had a double blow of economic collapse. What you found was a creative response from people like this crazy physical cultural—physical culture entrepreneur by the name of Bernard Macfadden who opened penny restaurants. He had made millions with the *New York Graphic* and his kind of exercise magazines and he—with his foundation he opened a bunch of restaurants around New York where all the dishes were one penny. So that was a creative response. (restaurant).

Occasionally you would find these fancy French restaurants still struggling along and trying—you know, no matter how depressed the Depression was in New York, there were still all the—you look at the *New Yorker* cartoons at the time and you see those people in their fur coats getting into the limousines and cursing Roosevelt, and they all went to these certain French restaurants, which even opened during the Depression and did business. But most people—you know, there was the Automat, there were these really good chain restaurants that—like Childs that were kind of lunchrooms but done on a more sort of—efficient and clean basis that served the masses, or at least people of limited means.

It wasn't a great period for New York dining. I mean, these things—even in my experience at the paper, you know, the fluctuations are—the restaurant economy is so sensitive. I happened to be reviewing restaurants when it was a very boom period of several years, and you could tell it, because I was racing just to keep up with restaurants that were opening and I think now Sam Sifton, the new guy, is looking at the lineup of restaurants coming online and thinking, "Gosh, it looks a little thin out there." So, in the Depression—you—I think that the—the explosion at the end—the reason I spend so much time talking about the World's Fair in New York is it was such an exciting breath of life after this horrible period from 1920 to 1939—that's a long time to have a slump in dining and there was just this kind of—there was color back in New York with the World's Fair. Although, of course, what came around the corner? World War II, so not a great period overall.

Q: I wonder if you could comment about the change in taste, actual taste, palate, of the public today. I see this because I sell fish, smoked fish and herring, on the Lower East Side, where the family's been doing it for a hundred years, and I've noticed changes in getting away from salt or not eating bones, and they want it easier, they don't want the bones, they don't want the fat fish, and I assume that's affected the restaurant trade, as well.

DAN BARBER: Well, not really. Not in my restaurant, I've seen the opposite trend—so for every trend there's a countertrend and the countertrend is almost the exact opposite of what you said, people want things with more bones and want foods that have salinity or tremendous amounts of flavor and are willing to both seek it out and pay for it, and, you know, I can only speak in this sense from my perspective, which is when they know where the bones are coming from, they're more likely to want to chew them.

(laughter)

RUTH REICHL: Yeah, luckily, every—half the restaurants in New York are now serving marrowbones. You could not even have imagined that five years ago. The thing that we noticed at the magazine was that the American taste for spice, for heat, for chili heat, exploded in the last five years. I mean, things that we wouldn't have dreamed of printing because they were just too hot, we were suddenly saying, "maybe we could make it a little hotter." The taste for acidity went up, suddenly people wanted more vinegar,

more lemon juice. There was a much bigger willingness to experiment with new spices. And that very, very slowly there is a new appetite for nose-to-tail eating, that we certainly couldn't have printed as many offal recipes as we did in the early forties, when there were tons of recipes for, you know, kidneys, hearts, tripes, sweetbreads, livers, and that's moderated some, but it's starting to creep back in where you're starting to be able to run recipes for—not kidneys so much but certainly liver and even occasionally tripe.

DAN BARBER: Those are the biggest requests when they come to my restaurant, brains and kidneys and livers, and that just does not stay in the kitchen. So, I don't know, maybe it will hit the Lower East Side by the end of the year.

RUTH REICHL: But certainly there is a real desire to eat less fat and to replace fat with what we were calling umami or power ingredients and to try and think of ways of ratcheting up the flavor without throwing in butter or meat fat.

Q: This is a question for the restaurant critics. You wield such enormous power, and it's within your grasp to change the fortunes, either up or down, for a restaurant, any given restaurant. I remember a conversation I had with someone in the food business about twenty years ago, and she told me that one of your predecessors, a restaurant critic for the *Times*, adjusted the ratings up or down based on two criteria, one of them being the number of rolls that are served, and the other being the temperature of the restaurant, especially during the hot days of summer. I'm not going to name the critic, but I suspect you know who it was, but—

RUTH REICHL: I don't have a clue who it was—**(laughter)** I can't imagine that that's true.

Q: I don't think this person had any reason to lie to me. If that's the case, how do you control such petty personal prejudices in writing a review? And a follow-up question, you know, if your editor knows about this, how does the editor control you?

(laughter)

RUTH REICHL: Well, certainly in my experience at the *New York Times*, the editors were extremely hands-off. I mean, I had been told before I went there that the editors were the ones who, you know, (who) determined the stars and told you where to go, well that couldn't have been less true. No one ever told me where to go and I imagine that's true for you or in any way weighed in on the stars—

DAN BARBER: Or how many rolls you were served?

RUTH REICHL: Or how many rolls you were served.

WILLIAM GRIMES: My sense of that story is that the restaurateur you're describing, first of all, I don't know how he could have known that that was the reason for the adjustment of the star unless he was inside the mind of the critic or if this person in an

unguarded moment said, “Yeah, I took him down because they had three rolls, and I wanted, and that’s too many rolls to get before dinner,” or “I was hungry and I wanted four rolls and they should have realized I wanted four rolls.” Listen, there are big considerations when you go into a restaurant, and the number of rolls is so far down on the list of what you’re worrying about **(laughter)** it’s very hard for me to believe that that’s going to determine adding or taking away a star.

You may find this hard to believe, but critics go in hoping they’re going to get a great meal. And they are so happy when they do get a good meal and are able to transmit that joy to the readership. Those were the best weeks of my life when I would hit a restaurant that was just clicking on all cylinders, and I could communicate my happiness to the people who put down their money for the newspaper, and it’s no fun to go to a restaurant where your pleasant expectations are dashed and then have to write about that, unless it’s Hudson Cafeteria, **(laughter)** in which case that is just a holiday. **(laughter)** But I hope—you know, I think critics tend to be rather—I was looking to my own soul—tend to be rather generous in spirit and not nitpicky and faultfinding on the small scale. I mean, they’re usually thinking of the bigger issues when they go into a restaurant, and there’s plenty of big things to talk about.

RUTH REICHL: And certainly, I mean, part of the job is you overcome your own prejudices. Everybody has certain things that they like less than others, and part of being professional is that you judge them on their own merits, whether it happens to be to your taste or not.

WILLIAM GRIMES: And also, all restaurateurs think they deserve one more star than they really do. **(laughter)** That's just a fact of life.

Q: This question's for Mr. Barber. How, if at all, are you influenced by reviews that you get, and do you make any conscious changes based on those or do you try to ignore them?

DAN BARBER: You know, I got a bad one yesterday, so your question's really timely, because I'm still figuring out exactly how to react to it. I don't say this in any kind of haughty way, it's one of the first ones we've gotten for—negative for Blue Hill New York. God, it really hurt, I have to say, like I pretended, you know, that it didn't hurt, but oh my God, it was really hard to read, especially because in my hubris, I talked to the reviewer on the phone for about half an hour, I must have gassed on a little too long, because I thought it was going to be a stunning review. I mean, I really had this wrong by several stars, and then some, so I felt like particularly embarrassed just because I had sort of played it up to the staff that this was going to be good, not exactly, but I definitely made it out to seem like this was going to be celebratory, so how do I react to it is—at family meal, I brought everybody in, and I don't want to say it was a meaningless review, but it wasn't the kind of review that someone would maybe find out about the next day—it wasn't a *New York Times* review, is what I'm trying to say.

RUTH REICHL: Do you want to say where it was?

DAN BARBER: It was Bloomberg News, I'm fine with that, **(laughter)** and the reviewer had been, and basically the reviewer compared Blue Hill New York to Blue Hill at Stone Barns and said for your money, Blue Hill at Stone Barns is the better restaurant, the Obamas made a mistake, you know, it was kind of like a little cheeseballish I thought, but, but, but, you know, had some things to say that I had already felt and so you know I brought the whole kitchen staff in and we have a lot of young new cooks and it had really made some pointed comments about the food, and said that the food was just not good and gave some examples, which I'm explaining to you that I already felt.

So I just kind of called a spade a spade and I made it very clear that comparing the two restaurants was a ridiculous comparison. It's apples and oranges, it's completely different execution of food, completely different atmosphere for executing that food, completely different price point. It's comparing this library to a branch library—that just makes no sense in terms of resources. But the comments that he had made meant that there was some work to do, and that, in this particular case, one of the luxuries that I had when Mr. Grimes came to review our restaurant was that we were totally unknown. And when the reviewer for Ruth, Jonathan Gold, came, totally unknown.

And when we opened up Blue Hill New York, I really wanted a low-ceiling restaurant, I wanted a place that you came into and you had low expectations for, there was paper on the table, there wasn't great silverware and you came in and if the service and if the food met that low expectation or in the rare times it did, superseded it, exceeded the

expectations, what an incredible response, because how often do we get our expectations superseded? Very, very rarely, whether it's theater or food or any of the arts, so that's what I went for, and that was our big success, I think. I'm not being falsely modest. I think one of the big contributors was the expectation level was low. Now, the expectation level, after the Obamas, after the success of Stone Barns, after the success of the restaurants in general, very hard to meet that in a place that seats forty people, that now has too-low ceilings and the paper's a little too old on the table, and whatnot.

These are the kind of things that I tried to explain to the staff and that it's a challenge, and that the challenge now, to the next phase of our existence is going to be much harder. So that's what I did. I don't know if it was the right thing to do. You know, there's some—some chefs, I've been at restaurants where chefs have gotten up after a mediocre or bad review and absolutely tore the reviewer apart and defended the staff up and down the aisle, and I felt like doing that, but I also felt like there was some fairness in what they were saying, and to put it in perspective probably meant that we could get something good out of it. And I have to tell you, last night's service, one of the best services I've ever worked at my own restaurant, so maybe I did an okay job.

(applause)

Q: How do all three of you feel about review sites like Yelp where the public can kind of review restaurants and weigh in, and do you see restaurant critics like yourself going the way of dinosaur now that everybody can say how they feel?

DAN BARBER: The question's about what do you feel about the blogosphere and that everybody's a critic these days?

WILLIAM GRIMES: I feel fine about it. I just—the whole premise behind sort of the enterprise at the *Times* is that you get an opinion and a voice that you like and trust, and that there's a commitment behind the newspaper to giving—providing a quality informed opinion and I don't think you get that guarantee, it's the Wild West in the blogosphere. You may get absolutely super brilliant great writers who know a lot about food and it's really worth following the blog and reading it, and you get a lot of complete idiots, so there's no—you just have to pick your way through it all—this is the big debate of the day—I mean, is this democratization of food criticism going to dilute the power of traditional food critics? To a certain extent it seems logical to say yes, it would have to, because in London when you go, you don't have one all-powerful theater critic, you have all these national newspapers, and you have twelve or thirteen theater critics, and it diffuses opinion, and it's actually, it's pretty good, I think, to have that.

How it's going to work in New York as far as food goes, I think it's an open question. I don't think it's as obvious an answer as, "Yeah, you've got all these other critics and therefore the equation is going to be plus for them is minus for us folks, because I don't—if you talk to restaurant owners, for example, ask them whether they care whether the *Times* comes in and gives them a, you know, a zero-star review, they're not going to say, "Well, it doesn't matter, because we'll make up for it with all these people who

come in and do you blahbity-blah.com and Yelp and they're going to talk about how much they love the place."

RUTH REICHL: I think it's a fascinating time, because we're at a point in our culture where restaurant critics have never been more closely read or held less power, because I think it's—it's undeniable that the power has been diluted by all these other voices out there. And what it does is it puts the burden on the institutions who are hiring restaurant critics to make them better writers, more authoritative. I mean, they really now have to stand out. What it means is that—there have been been for a long time a lot of people out there writing for respectable institutions who just weren't that good, weren't that knowledgeable, didn't write that well, and, you know, it really means that if you're paying for an opinion as opposed to just going online, you want it to teach you something, be authoritative and be a great read.

DAN BARBER: I learn a lot from the blogosphere, but I'm more with what was said here. I think we're going to—I was told that we should run this as much time as an analyst gives you as a patient, and I don't know where we are in the session, but maybe we'll—

RUTH REICHL: And when he said that he said seventy-eight minutes, and I thought—

DAN BARBER: Who's your analyst? **(laughter)** Yes, in the back, last two questions, let's say, and then we'll—

Q: Since you said that there are no new ideas, I'm wondering having gone through history what are some of the ideas you would like to see come back and perhaps, chef, what are some of the ideas that you've poached that you think, "Hmm, I *am* going to bring these back."

DAN BARBER: You first.

WILLIAM GRIMES: Let me see, what would I like to see again? Well, I would like to see more kidneys on toast. That was a big dish in the steakhouses around Times Square. And I would like to see more fat, which has just become anathema everywhere, and I know that its, you know, it's almost like saying I want to see slavery reintroduced or something, it's so retrograde, but I went to Germany a couple years ago and I ate at this kind of farmhouse restaurant where they were reintroducing this breed of pig that had almost disappeared, there were about twelve of them left twenty years ago and in bringing back this breed they brought back the luscious taste and mouth-filling sensation of what pig is supposed to be, which is like a decent amount of fat on it, rather than this cardboard—

RUTH REICHL: Somebody is raising those here now, we did a piece about it.

WILLIAM GRIMES: So that's one of my wishes that will never come true except in very isolated little pockets of resistance.

DAN BARBER: What do you mean never come true? Come to Stone Barns. We're raising them. Okay, go ahead, I'm sorry.

RUTH REICHL: My favorite short story of all time probably is "All You Can Eat for five Bucks" by Joseph Mitchell and I yearn for someone to bring back the beefsteak, a great New York institution.

DAN BARBER: So I guess my I would go with what Bill Grimes said here with these breeds and varieties of vegetables, breeds of meats that have been lost, and to recapture them, and I don't—again mean that in just the most nostalgic way in like turning back the clock and getting all the stuff that we used to have in terms of the diversity on the plate and the biodiversity on the farm, but I would marry that with some of the breeders that are out there, that we're trying to work with more and more. I think it's an absolutely fascinating field of taking breeds, older varieties of breeds, regionalizing them, in other words making them adaptable to the Hudson Valley, in our case, and making them thrive in ways, that in flavor ways and in economic return for farmers, in other words, they grow well, they don't have a big failure rate, in ways that we haven't even begun to scratch the surface on.

The trend of, you know, the chef knowing the farmer and the chef going to the farm is a great story and oh God, it's told so much, and it's like it's one of those things that's becoming a little old and a little bit co-opted by people who actually really don't do it, so,

you know, I think if the—dialing back to the beginning of this session—you know, if we were talking about the tectonic shift of the diner having the power and now the chef having the power, maybe the next tectonic shift is the breeders and the farmers who are wiling to support the breeders, because that's really the big problem, is that there are very few farmers who are willing to take on the technology that breeders at land-grant universities—Cornell is one great example in New York—that are taking some of these old onions that haven't been grown in New York State in a hundred years and reregionalizing them and getting flavors that you just absolutely cannot imagine, also storagability for the winter, so relocalizing the economy, anyway, this is in the hands of brilliant scientists that we need to support, both chefs and farmers need to support, so if that was a trend that was old, I don't know, but sort of marrying this idea of this diversity on the farm and bringing it to the plate I think is the next, you know, trend or the next place where chefs really need to concentrate and focus their passion and their attention.

Q: Hey guys. By the way, Ruth, the beefsteak is actually coming back to New York this Sunday, and it's happening in Brooklyn, so someone did bring it back.

RUTH REICHL: Where?

Q: At the Bell House. My question is right now it seems like we're going through this phase of you know molecular gastronomy and really new cooking techniques like sous-vide and, you know, hydrocolloids and liquid nitrogen. It has its supporters, it has its detractors, a lot of the people say to the detractors, "well, once upon a time cooking over

an open flame was a weird thing." In the history of kind of New York have there been other techniques that we think about today that were just normal that were met with reluctance and pushback?

WILLIAM GRIMES: Gas flame. The transition from coal to gas was a hugely—chefs were very divided about that in the early twentieth century—late nineteenth, early twentieth century, and there was a lot of resistance to the idea that—well, they knew how to cook with coal and gas was the kind of X factor. A lot of them felt that it dried out food in a way that coal fire didn't. They—I suspect that perhaps the early gas wasn't that consistent, that maybe it tended to—I don't know enough about the technology of gas, but it seems—my impression was that maybe the supply wasn't as stable as it is today and that therefore it wasn't consistent for chefs to use, so, anyway, that's a big example. Source of heat, that's about as basic as you can get for a restaurant.

RUTH REICHL: I would say, in home cooking, the introduction of the Cuisinart was met, or the food processor, was met with enormous skepticism. What did you need that for? That was something that was highfalutin and for chefs and why would anybody want that in their own home? And, you know, now I would venture to say there are very few people who cook in this room who don't have some kind of a food processor.

DAN BARBER: Yeah, I use a lot of the technologies that you mentioned, and I get a lot of flak for it on the blogosphere by the way—because why is a farmer, here I am talking about what I really want to be is a farmer—but why is a chef who is espousing the Slow

Food aesthetic and conceit why would he be so enamored with all the latest technologies? And I—

RUTH REICHL: It is irritating that you're supposed to be a Luddite if you're interested in real food.

DAN BARBER: She said it better than I would.

Q: One pushy last one? I recently had a meal in one of the few three-star Michelin restaurants in New York which was incomprehensible. Everyone at the table rated it zero stars. We just couldn't understand, we said, "This is beyond a bad night, we wouldn't know what to tell them to improve, there are so many things." It was kind of Monty Python–like, and I wonder reviewers go in multiple times into a restaurant for a given review, correct? What kind of variability in experience would you say you had in the very top of the line restaurants?

RUTH REICHL: Before we answer that, can I just vent a little bit? It just drives me crazy that New Yorkers are suddenly taking a French critic's idea of what our restaurants should be. It's just—what do the French know about what our tastes are and why do we give them that power? It's just irritating.

(applause)

Q: We had to send food back, they kept on pouring bubbly water and flat water, I mean, five times, dropping—I'm not being—

DAN BARBER: You're not a reviewer for Bloomberg News—

Q: No, no.

WILLIAM GRIMES: Maybe they were breaking in a new waiter—

Q: Your experience in variability is what I'm interested in.

WILLIAM GRIMES: I did not find at the level you're talking about. I didn't find where I would go in one night and it was absolute disaster comedy of errors and I'd go back four days later and suddenly the service was perfect and everything was fine-tuned. The variability was in a much narrower range. And this sounds like—whatever you're talking about sounds like some unaccountable disaster having to do with maybe people not showing up, or, you know, a story behind the story there, or else, maybe the story is behind whoever was reviewing that restaurant, I don't know.

RUTH REICHL: I mean, every restaurant has a bad night. I'm sure you've had disaster nights in your restaurant.

DAN BARBER: I was going to say, I think you could have come. I don't have three Michelin stars, and thankfully now, I don't care that I don't, but you could have come to Blue Hill at Stone Barns and paid a lot of money for a meal that you were extremely disappointed in and had kind of, what did you say, Kafkaesque overtones, I don't know what you said, but sounded miserable and I think that happens to us more often than, you know, I'd like to admit. I think it would be very hard to come back to my restaurant or to a Michelin three-star restaurant and have that experience twice, which is why reviewers should be doing it more than once, but to have it once and have it be sort of a laughable experience and how could, you know, Ruth or Bill given that three stars, I think is really possible, and the reasons for that, just as were mentioned, there's always a story, there's people who don't show up, there's disasters that happen, there are so many variables, it's a more frequent occurrence than I care to admit, though I just admitted it, so—

(applause)