



KITCHEN SECRETS

BILL BUFORD WITH MARIO BATALI AND ANTHONY BOURDAIN

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Celeste Bartos Forum

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PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Truly *Heat* tonight. My name is Paul Holdengräber and I'm the Director of Public Programs here at the New York Public Library. As you all know, as the director of LIVE I often say that my goal is to make the lions roar, well, I think tonight they will be feasting. It is a pleasure to welcome the three Bs here tonight. Last night I had a wonderful way of falling asleep. I read Bill Buford's piece about desserts in the current issue of June twenty-sixth, which I highly encourage you to read. It's very, very tasty, and to give you an idea just of the style, I will give myself the pleasure of reading a paragraph from it, which will give you a sense just how wonderful a writer he is.

"I sought out Goldfarb because I wanted to learn about dessert. I now recognize that going to him as a tutor was akin to learning how to drive by hanging around a NASCAR racetrack. My interests were pretty basic. I didn't know why dessert was invented or what function in the running of human organism it was meant to perform. I wasn't even sure when it was invented. Raising livestock, vegetable farming, the harvesting of grains—these activities are ancient, older

than history and essential to the survival of the species. But when did humankind decide that it also needed a crème brûlée? **(laughter)** For instance, I eat tuna sandwich and an apple and I understand more or less what they give my body, what they give my body, but what I don't get, is what I get out of a piece of Key Lime pie. Desserts are a problem You're a person who eats them and regrets that you did, or you're one who never eats them, or you eat them and know enough to eat only a little, or else you eat them and eat them until you're done with it—that's me. Face to face with a dessert, my judgment goes walkabout. I devour it with unreflecting dispatch, indifferent to its qualities or its composition or the skill of its making. Jabbering away, jiggling in my seat, metabolism spinning at maximum revs, sweat beading up inexplicably on my forehead, wondering, while looking out for another helping, how anything could possibly be bad when manifestly it makes me feel so good. And then, betraying an undiagnosed intolerance for milky things or doughy things or sugary things, or just for eating too much, I wake in the night, sick, thinking, how could I possibly have been so stupid to do this, again? Desserts frighten me.”

I can tell you from this that Bill Buford is an extraordinary and wonderful writer, and it is a great pleasure to welcome him here together with Anthony Bourdain, who runs Les Halles, and also to have Mario Batali here. I have not had the pleasure of eating in either of their restaurants, which is too bad, but I hope after this evening they will invite me. **(laughter)** As you all know, Bill Buford was the editor and founder of *Granta*. He also wrote a book, which is highly relevant at this particular moment, on thugs, since we're in the middle of the World Cup, and he is the author of a book which now is number thirteen on the *New York Times* best-seller list, *Heat*. It has a wonderful subtitle: *An Amateur's Adventures as Kitchen Slave, Line Cook, Pasta-maker, and Apprentice to a Dante-quoting Butcher in Tuscany*.

Tomorrow I invite all of you, that is, all of you who have tickets, because we have the same kind of situation tomorrow, to come and celebrate *Slate*, which is celebrating its tenth birthday. I invite you all to join our e-mail list, so you might know what we will be up to next year, to become a Friend of the Library, so that you can enjoy the benefits of being a Friend and can partake in one of the last beacons of democracy, namely this library. There will be a Q and A at the end of this session, which will last more or less as long as a psychoanalytical session, about fifty-five minutes. There will be Q and A, where I highly encourage you to ask questions rather

than to make statements. And there will be a book signing of the three books featured by our wonderful talent today. We have assembled, as I've told you, the three Bs, Bill Buford, Mario Batali, and Anthony Bourdain, to discuss, reveal some kitchen secrets. Whenever I hear the word "secret," I am always reminded of the wonderful word of Thomas Jefferson, who said that for two people to keep a secret, one has to be dead. **(laughter)** And now, without further ado, it is my pleasure to welcome them to talk about food.

(applause)

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I'm in the unusual position of kind of reverting to chef mode here so that this conversation doesn't immediately become a all-Batali love fest, as something that I've experienced before, so I'm going to try to impose some . . .

MARIO BATALI: Justice. Justice. Justice.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: . . . some semblance of order here. Bill, you've written a book about, well, your own sort of personal journey from, you know, desk jockey to line cook. You're talking about the life of the cook, you know, the magic, mystery, and torment of the kitchen, and about Don Mario, over here, as well as some other characters. Why did you write this book?

BILL BUFORD: That's a lie!

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Why Mario? And what happened to you that you would want to subject yourself to life in the Babbo kitchen?

BILL BUFORD: I invited him to dinner, and he accepted, and it went downhill from there. I invited him for dinner for my, I was having a birthday dinner for the writer Jay McInerney, I was the fiction editor at the *New Yorker* then. I was a civilian. I had a very good job, I wore a tie. And I got Mario's number from Jay and told him could he come along to celebrate Jay's birthday, and he said yes, and I hung up the phone and went into the living room and told my wife and she was apoplectic, she said, "Oh my God, what are we going to do now?" And sure enough, he arrived,

like Santa Claus, bearing a big bag of goodies, including a giant slab of raw pork fat which he cut into slivers and put on the back of all of our tongues and said, right there in the back you can taste the pig in the last three months of its seven-hundred-and-fifty-pound piggy life, apples and cream and walnuts, and I don't think anyone had experienced anything like that in their lives, and they sort of let the fat dissolve and they got thirsty and we drank and ate more fat and we drank and we ate more fat and we drank and we ate more fat and we drank and then three o'clock in the morning there was our beloved hero, playing a—

MARIO BATALI: You're not going to recite the whole book are you? Needless to say it starts like *Private Ryan*, it's just like twenty-five minutes of oh my God!

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: And this incident led you to decide to become his bitch for two years *why?* (laughter)

BILL BUFORD: I went to the *New Yorker*—

MARIO BATALI: It was that moment of the lard on the tongue, it really smoked him.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Completely understandable.

BILL BUFORD: I went into the *New Yorker* the following week and said, so, we've got to write about this guy, and David Remnick in his wisdom suggested that I should write it, and I proposed to Mario that I—one, that the *New Yorker* wanted to write a piece about him and that was a good thing and I said, and I'm going to write it and he thought that was a good thing and I said, and I want to work in your kitchen, and he wanted ba-ba-ba-ba-I'm not so sure about that.

MARIO BATALI: Well actually it started, quite honestly, Bill got the okay from Remnick and then didn't tell me for three months while we were hanging out—then he started to admit.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I thought it was a riveting, compelling, and utterly believable account, I mean, watching him move from you know lowly prep dog up the line, I mean, I bought it. Was he any good at all, at the end of the two years, really, was he in any way useful, meaning, if he showed up at my restaurant . . . **(laughter)**

MARIO BATALI: Useful, yes, really good . . .

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: If I trailed him for three nights on grill, could he—

MARIO BATALI: He could pull off the grill. I would tell you he could pull off the grill on not a complicated menu, but he understands the timing and he does understand the cooking. As he will admit—

BILL BUFORD: Stop there stop there stop there thank you, yes!

MARIO BATALI: But as I warned him, the pasta station is a young man's game, and Bill, you're not a young man anymore.

(laughter)

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I gotta tell you, I'm not working a pasta station.

MARIO BATALI: It's just very difficult and it's a very, we're very good at pasta, so the expectations are high, so people order a lot of it, and so you really don't even get the luxury of looking at tickets, you just you're a short-order cook and they told you about ten minutes ago what it was going to be and then they pick it up and it's literally, ten–fifteen plates at a crack and then followed by ten–fifteen plates. It's more substantial responsibility.

BILL BUFORD: This is the very thing, actually, that Mario told me at the time, because I'd done the piece for the *New Yorker*, then I wanted to go back and do a book, and in the meantime I'd done this kind of pasta tour, actually Mario's itinerary. My wife and I going through Emilia-

Romagna and all of these wonderful places and then I came back pasta-obsessed and said, I want to work on the pasta station and Mario said, “Eeeehh, no chance,” and I said, “Mario, come on,” and, “No chance,” and “Oh, come on, Mario,” and then he let me do it . . .

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Tough kitchen, I mean, physically it’s not the roomiest in New York, is it?

MARIO BATALI: Right. I mean the pasta guy has as much space as anybody else. He has a corner.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: So you talk in the book about how cooks—professional cooks—don’t talk about *preparing* food, they don’t talk about *cooking* food, they use the word *making* food. Why is that?

BILL BUFORD: Well, the pasta station was a very good illustration. I mean by that point, I’d gone from kitchen slave to kitchen bitch and in fact the pasta machine is called the kitchen sort of the pasta bitch, I was always the kitchen bitch cleaning the pasta bitch at the end of the night. **(laughter)** But it was Mario’s sous-chef, Frankie, maybe trying to ease me out of the pasta station, trying to sort of get me back to a place where I wasn’t going to make such a fool out of myself, said, “Well, you know, pasta, you’re just making food that other people have already made,” because the pasta is made during the day and there’s all these wonderful fresh pastas that Babbo sells, and there’s all these wonderful ragouts, and they’ve all been done during the day, and what you really want to do is make *food*, and that’s what being in the kitchen is about, is making food, and it made me realize—and then he encouraged me to go back to the grill, mainly to get me away from the pasta station—but it made me realize that there is a deep satisfaction that the restaurant taught me which is the satisfaction of cooking and it is actually the act of *making food*. It’s an act involving your eyes, and your hands, and an actual creation of plate, and when I was working on the grill station, it was one of my great thrills was that maybe over the course of the night there would be twenty, thirty plates that were *right*, and I’d put it up on the pass and it felt good.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: That's a perfect moment, isn't it, when it's in the window before it goes out to the customer.

MARIO BATALI: Before it gets ruined and eaten!

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Bill talks about sort of a food epiphany in the kitchen. He describes the thyme leaves popping in the pan as making him particularly happy.

MARIO BATALI: I believe he got wood.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I was leaving that out.

MARIO BATALI: I'm not sure if he used it that way.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: You've been in the restaurant business, you've been playing with food for years and years and years. You know, what's still magic for you? You know, when—bread coming out of the oven, do you have similar moments still, and where would those be?

MARIO BATALI: Absolutely. When I'm—when someone I'm working with—comes up with a dish that I say to myself I could have almost come up with that dish too. And that we're working together and we have a cohesive mindset in each of the seven kitchens that I work in and that each one is distinct and yet each one clearly has the mark of both myself and the chef and the sous-chef and the pastry chef and when all those things come together and you're either sitting there eating it, or you're back there helping them, or there's a particularly difficult crisis, when a plate of perfect food comes up, it's a great moment, I mean, it's what we do, and it's what we live for, and it's what makes the kind of the *giving* of the hospitality nature of the reason that we like this so much really kind of whole.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: But is it one particular process—like for me, you know when you're making pasta, right, and you're finishing it, it's just ready to come out of the pan onto the plate, that last second when you throw in the olive oil and it kind of sits up.

MARIO BATALI: That one right there is, also. That and the smell of somebody else making French toast. It's a great moment.

BILL BUFORD: What Mario's describing, I didn't write about it—

MARIO BATALI: I'm sorry, Freedom Toast. **(laughter)**

BILL BUFORD: What he's describing, I didn't write about it, but I had a chance to witness it. When the seasons changed, Mario would gather his executive chef, his sous-chefs, maybe somebody who's his favorite cook at the moment, his pastry chef, and they'd sit around a table and they'd all come up with ideas for how to inaugurate the next season.

MARIO BATALI: And quickly too, we liked to immediately—

BILL BUFORD: It was fantastic. It was like cooking *riffing* and then somebody would suggest a dish, and Mario would invariably say, yeah, but add pancetta—

MARIO BATALI: Or take three ingredients out.

BILL BUFORD: Or take three ingredients—that's a very crucial Italian philosophy, take three ingredients out.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: So Mario, what is a chef? What does it take? What does it mean? What does it take to be a chef and does a chef, especially one with as many restaurants as you. Should you expect a chef to actually be at their restaurant in every case?

BILL BUFORD: Well, John Mariani, I'm glad you brought that up.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Ah, yeah.

MARIO BATALI: I think the chef's responsibility, in a chef-owned, chef-driven restaurant, is to be *present* in the kitchen. If you talk to someone like Paul Bocuse, who's asked, you know, who's cooking in your kitchen when you're over here in America, well the same people that are cooking when I'm standing in the kitchen. And then when you talk to Alain Ducasse, "Well, how do you do all these visits?" he says, "I'm in every kitchen I own, every bit of the day." And it's really more about setting the standard and leading the good guys into the place where they've gotta go, or the girls, with the food, and although I'm not in every kitchen every day, you can tell that I've *been* there, and you can tell that Andy's been at Casa Mono, you can tell that Frank's at Babbo, and you can tell that April's at The Spotted Pig. There's a kind of working together process where you have to kind of accept at a certain point that you're not going to step on each other's toes. If something sucks, you say it sucks, and it works out really well.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Your operations are generally from the ground up built around your relationship with a particular chef most times.

MARIO BATALI: All of them. As say Esca for example. Esca's really Dave's restaurant. I helped him and we kind of got it rolling, but I mean, there's very little of me at Esca and there's not so much of me at Casa Mono and there's a lot of me at Babbo and there's a lot of me at Otto and you can just tell kind of where I spend my time. But that doesn't mean that it's slipped away in quality. It's gone to further augment itself and become something even better than I would have imagined.

BILL BUFORD: Part of the genius of the way the restaurant is run is that Mario makes room for the chefs as they're growing and developing. Every chef, you can see it working in the kitchen. You're cooking somebody's food over and over again, over and over again, day in day out, year in year out, and they get frustrated, and usually they go off and go to Les Halles, say, but what Mario and his partner Joe Bastianich have figured out to do is they take these chefs that have been with them for so long and then find a place for them and allow them in to be equity partners and everybody knows that if you stick with the program for long enough you join this much bigger team.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I have to say I think what you're doing is part of a larger phenomenon and for the first time in history whatever you might think about the celebrity chef phenomenon, even at its most annoying, for the first time in—certainly in American history—chefs are, and I think you've been instrumental in this, chefs are for the first time deciding what you're going to eat next year. I mean, you've created markets. Did we know that we needed *crudos* or you know, Sardinian pizza. Did we know that we needed more offal in our lives?

MARIO BATALI: I think we did.

(laughter)

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I mean, *we* knew that, but I mean for the first time, chefs are empowered to pretty much tell the public that next year it's going to be pork belly because we like it, that's what we eat and we love, and I think that's—you've changed the landscape of food in New York by, you know, doing *that*, where I think a lot of other chefs would have kind of said, well, you know, I'll open up twelve restaurants, they'll all serve linguine pomodoro, whack their customers \$29.95 and, you know, that's that. You apparently decided we need more brains in our lives, and you've got people to eat them.

BILL BUFORD: Hear, hear.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: What do you think? Obviously you spent a lot of time with both Mario and unbelievably a lot of time with Marco Pierre White, a chef, who I have to say, in all the chefs I've met in my life, I've never met one—well, if I'd gotten down on one knee and kissed his pinkie ring, I don't think I would have found that inappropriate. What do they have in common, given their tortured history, is there a common thread?

BILL BUFORD: Staggering quantities of testosterone.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Really, you think that's it, that's all?

BILL BUFORD: Mario, in his early career, when he tried to go to cooking school and got very bored, found himself working in a pub, if I may summarize your early career in this way.

MARIO BATALI: Again, don't read the book, Bill.

BILL BUFORD: Found himself working in a pub with an unknown chef named Marco Pierre White who's since become the legendary Marco Pierre White and is probably the most famous chef in Britain and is a histrionic, hysterical, screaming, charismatic, lovely, wild man. And at some point I got it in my head I wanted to reenact a mini-version of Mario's life and be trained by the people who had trained him, and while Marco didn't really train Mario, he inspired Mario, and we spent a lot of time in London hanging out with Marco, who was pretty mad, I mean, just in little things he was pretty mad. He'd throw a cigarette over the balustrade and it would land in his wife's lap. He'd get excited about a sunset and he'd kick out the windscreen. Once we went hunting—because Marco, he goes hunting—and he pulled a rifle on these men who shouldn't have been there, and I thought, why I am going around with this man always with loaded weapons?

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Yeah, I mean Marco's famously, allegedly, very litigious, and he is also allegedly, well, let's put it this way, Gordon Ramsay came up with Marco, and he's a cupcake compared to him. **(laughter)** I mean, rough. Those were rough, rough kitchens, and I happen to know, that as you know, this was a traumatic time for young Mario.

BILL BUFORD: Marco rushes into libel suits, and it is true, I'm not entirely comfortable yet, because he's also dyslexic, so I know he hasn't read the book yet, so any moment once he's gone through the audio version I might finally hear from his lawyers.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: What would have happened, what do you think would have happened, if you guys had just really hit it off, you know, for whatever reason, you really liked working with Marco, I mean, would your feelings about French cuisine be different today?

MARIO BATALI: I think—we would have gotten married and he would be my bitch. I think the funniest thing about Marco Pierre White was he was cooking French food but he went down to the wine shop down around the corner to have them translate the menu into French every day because he'd never been there.

BILL BUFORD: And he still hasn't been there! Well, he went to the racetrack one day.

MARIO BATALI: I think he went once. But he was an inspirational cook who—I never could have worked with him that much longer, because it was not my destiny to be the number five, or the number six, in his kitchen, which is where he wanted everyone to be, but what I did learn from him and what I saw from him the very first time in my life was that cooking is well beyond just putting linguini in a pan and taking it out with a couple of oysters and piling it on a shell like he does. It's a creative and completely personal project that you may or may not be able to successful with and he obviously was tremendously successful. I think a large part of his fame was in fact due to the fact that the English people like their rock stars to pee or puke on them. They like to elevate someone who will then treat them badly and they take them back down and get rid of them over the next couple of years.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I have to say I remember in, I think, the early eighties when all—when the notion of the chef for all the cooks I worked with when we tried to imagine a chef it was Paul Bocuse, you know, somebody with a tall hat, probably French, it was Paul Bocuse and then it was Chef Boyardee, that was the image of the chef, (**laughter**) and somebody brought in that book *White Heat*, and there was Marco, you know, gaunt, burnt out—

MARIO BATALI: Sitting with a giant sturgeon—

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Earlier, it was him with rings under his eyes, long scraggly hair—

MARIO BATALI: Chain-smoking.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Chain-smoking, with a cigarette in his mouth in the kitchen.

MARIO BATALI: While he's preparing food, sweat pouring down his face.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: The effect was the first time that all of us thought, "Wow, he looks like us, you know, we can do this, there is room in this business."

BILL BUFORD: Tony, Tony, he looks like *you*.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Not anymore, he don't.

MARIO BATALI: He looks more like me now, I think.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: For a business that has classically attracted, you know, misfits, refugees, dreamers, dyslexics, I mean, very high, a huge number of chefs are dyslexics.

MARIO BATALI: I've always liked to say up until the mid-seventies becoming a chef or a cook was the last thing you did on your way out of the military, on your way to jail. It's changed a bit since then.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I mean in your interviewing process and in doing *Heat* did you find any common thread, other than testosterone? I mean, for God's sake.

BILL BUFORD: No, Marco was interesting that way because he really, he really can't read, he would have been a failure. He's one of these people, you know, in the same way that sort of strong, strapping guys become boxers and they couldn't have been anything else. Marco probably couldn't have done much else except what he did in the kitchen.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I mean Gordon's like, Gordon Ramsey's like that as well, but I mean they both entered a business where we wear aprons and clogs and do essentially what our mothers did. We cook. We paint little pictures on plates, we nurture people so, there are—my feeling is that people who are from the beginning uncomfortable with other aspects, certain

aspects, of their lives, naturally gravitate towards a business where they can do things with their hands, their senses, am I off base here?

MARIO BATALI: Totally on.

BILL BUFORD: Which is, I think, the point that I got out of Marco, is that he was a person who did everything with his eyes and hands, and that was the great satisfaction for him, was making plates and in London they say you can always tell a plate that Marco's put together, if a runner brings that out you can tell when he's in the kitchen because he's got that amazing visual sense. I think that's what makes a great cook, is that amazing visual sense. Mario's got a great guy—

MARIO BATALI: That's a lie.

BILL BUFORD: He's got a great guy in his kitchen, Frankie, who is a very similar kind of beast, he's just so visual and so physical and so fast, but words are not his thing. Words are not his thing.

MARIO BATALI: As you described in *Heat*, you worked with home-style pasta makers, a Dante-quoting butcher learning how to break down pork and do wonderful things to it. What was that like, and would any of the people you met in Italy ever have any hope of being on Food Network?

MARIO BATALI: Dario would.

BILL BUFORD: Dario would. Dario would.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: You think so?

BILL BUFORD: Oh, completely.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: He can cook.

MARIO BATALI Well, he's a butcher. He makes soppressata. He makes a giant headcheese that's as big as a golf bag, this big around, it's just lying there on the counter. And you walk in and he's elevated on a marble stage with opera music in the back and he's got one of those little cravat things going on. He's a handsome guy, he's just the most golden Italian hospitalitarian, you walk in there and just, wow, you just love the guy no matter what. Before you even taste his magnificent food. He would be made for the Food Network, maybe he would be a game show host.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: But he has an accent though, they don't like that, do they?

BILL BUFORD: He has huge personality.

MARIO BATALI: He has a Tuscan accent. He speaks ten words of English and all of his esses and hard cees are like Haaah, it's amazing to hear him speak, it's literally like you're speaking to someone in the Medici family.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: So you know what you're doing with a pig now? If I threw you a whole pig and a knife you'd know what to do?

BILL BUFORD: Well, I had my pig moments, and my wife and I had a pig moment, bringing one home on the Vespa, we were able to learn from Dario in that. We went there for two weeks. I mean, the idea was, Mario was always saying, you know, if you really want to learn Italian cooking, you have to go to Italy. And I learned an enormous amount at Babbo, but finally I was in an Italian restaurant in America. And all the cooks knew that if they really want to learn this thing, they've really got to go *there* and learn the touch, or the sense of simplicity. Really, it's the sense of simplicity. You can go to an Italian restaurant here and you can look at the menu and you can tell immediately whether the chef has been to Italy or not.

MARIO BATALI: Even once for a day.

(laughter)

MARIO BATALI: It's true.

BILL BUFORD: Mainly from how much—he hasn't been to Italy if he's adding a bunch of junk to it. It's the take out the three ingredients philosophy. And I went for two weeks. I phoned Dario out of the blue. I said I'm a friend of Mario Batali. "*Accidenti!*" I said I know Armandino Batali. "*Accidenti!*" I know Faith Willinger. "*Accidenti!*" He said "Come!" We went for two weeks and came back for a birthday and thought, "Damn, we gotta go back." We went for another month and got back and went "Damn, we've got to go back." And then I was there for six months, and then came back the following year and we're going again this summer. I'll go back into the butcher shop.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: So is he full of shit or can he cut meat?

(laughter)

MARIO BATALI: He can cut meat slowly. **(laughter)** He knows what it's called and he knows how to get there.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Is it necessary, indeed necessary, as you suggest, to have a belly to make pasta correctly? You know, you were talking about the kind of tuck and roll.

BILL BUFORD: This is one of the lessons, probably the most important lesson that I learned from Betta. Betta was the first person to teach Mario, I believe I'm correct in saying, how to make pasta, handmade pasta with a wooden roller on a wooden board. And the trick is stretching rather than pressing. It's true, she taught me the belly trick. And the belly trick is you kind of press your belly against—with some bellies it's a little more wieldy than others.

MARIO BATALI: Betta didn't have a belly.

BILL BUFORD: I'm just repeating what she said. In my mind, she had a belly—it was a different belly from my belly, it was a different belly from your belly, but you press the little lip of the pasta with your belly against the board and you stretch it out.

MARIO BATALI: Yep.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I'm not going there.

MARIO BATALI: Let's put it this way. There are a couple of things where you actually prepare something for someone to put in their body, and one of them is making pasta.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I told you I wasn't going to go there. Okay, Mario, you have what, how many restaurants now?

MARIO BATALI: Six and a half.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: You're opening in Vegas, right?

MARIO BATALI: Two restaurants next December.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: And Los Angeles.

MARIO BATALI: One restaurant.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: You've got the vineyard thing going on in Italy.

MARIO BATALI: Yep.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Got the Nascar—

MARIO BATALI: Spotted Pig's not really my restaurant, but I go there a lot.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I mean, life, presumably, is pretty good. You've, as I said, you've changed the entire restaurant landscape in New York and, you know, maybe America.

Theoretically, I mean, I'm guessing, you've probably got enough money to spend the next six months on an island someplace running around in a Speedo.

(laughter)

MARIO BATALI: Purple butt flaps, Tony, come on.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Why do you keep doing it? When's it going to stop? Are you ever going to like, just, you know, kick back, and . . .

MARIO BATALI: That's a question I often hear, and I don't have that answer. Basically, the reason we open new restaurants, at this point, is, for twelve years I've been in New York City—fourteen years I've been in New York City—and as I find really talented people, I say, “Stick around there will be a slice of the pie.” Well, there's like four pies still left out there of people that are really—have worked really hard for me and with me and are ready for their own project, and one of those is Zack Allen, who is going to be the executive chef in Las Vegas. He started as a line cook coming out of some French restaurant like La Reserve six years ago and the most important thing I can say about Zack Allen is that in the middle of the interview for the line cook job at Lupa, he fell asleep, **(laughter)** and I said, “Hire this guy! He's relaxed!” and he's going to be the king of the Las Vegas, of two great restaurants in Las Vegas, that he can run and he'll be able to do it.

BILL BUFORD: Whether he's awake or not.

MARIO BATALI: Now he knows how to wake, he's medicated at this point, he knows how to take care of it.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I'm buying the personal loyalty thing.

BILL BUFORD: Why did you quit, Tony, why did you quit, do you ever want to go back? Maybe what you're asking Mario is—

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: When *Kitchen Confidential*—when I wrote *Kitchen Confidential* and for a few months afterwards, I was standing on my feet, I was working the lunch sauté station, serving a hundred and fifty lunches, standing around and expediting every day, working around fourteen hours. If you're asking me would I rather be doing that or bitching about the thread count at the Four Seasons in Singapore . . . **(laughter)** I'm milking this celebrity chef thing for all I can get and *I* know when to cash out, but I mean I appreciate that there are people who have done right by you, I understand the creative urge, but I mean are you addicted to the adrenalin—I mean, I've seen you hopping from restaurant to restaurant around New York, checking your food costs, seeing how things went, I mean, is it an addiction, are you . . .

MARIO BATALI: Let's put it this way, addiction, whatever, it's *fun*. I like what I do, and it's great, and believe me, the celebrity chef thing aside, we're lucky to be successful businesspeople at what we do and what we happen to do is something that we really like, and it's something that also very rarely presents something to me that's unfathomably difficult to figure out or deal with, so in this small little way, we're kind of in charge of our destiny, and what I have in probably the most simple way, I have *absolute* freedom. There's no better job than mine. I can do whatever the fuck I want whenever the fuck I want to do it at work. That's pretty good.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: But I mean, sitting under a palm tree with a mojito for six months, that's not doing it for you?

MARIO BATALI: That won't do it for me.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: What about you, writer guy, **(laughter)** now that you've had a serious taste of the life. I mean, one of the great things reading your book, was early on he's describing characters who he meets and we get a full paragraph on him and by the end of the

book he meets a character and he describes him as “dickhead.” I mean, I’m not saying you’re one of us, but you’re getting there. The latest *New Yorker*, you’re doing the pastry article. Is this a strange addictive compulsion that might never end?

BILL BUFORD: It might never end. It might never end. I’m never going to be like you guys, but—there’s no question that working at Babbo, or slaving at Babbo, or doing whatever I was doing at Babbo, changed my life, and it changed my life because, frankly, it’s what Mario describes. I found I was having a lot of fun. A lot of it was I enjoyed being stupid and curious, and as long as I can be stupid and curious, stupid about a lot of cooking, but curious and wanting to know how to do it, then I’ll probably stay in this in some kind of way. And now I’ve got a very nice gig at the *New Yorker* where they encourage me to be stupid and curious.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I gotta say, I understand completely what you’re saying. I mean, I feel that way about travel.

BILL BUFORD: In a way that’s kind of what you’re doing. We’re both stupid and curious.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: And I feel that way about travel.

BILL BUFORD: Actually, what I’m loving about *your* book is it’s full of ideas I’m going to steal.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Well, feel free. I like it. For me, traveling, traveling, it’s great to be forced to *learn* things. Every time you go to a new country, you are essentially stupid.

BILL BUFORD: In a way, you’ve become our sort of modern food anthropologist. You’re going to all these places and you’re on the verge of discovering, it’s as if you’re on the verge of discovering a kind of universal truth about food.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: It’s really all about me. **(laughter)**

MARIO BATALI: Mostly about him and Asian women chasing him in Korean airports.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: No, it's not about that at all.

MARIO BATALI: Isn't there a certain point when you get to the end of the week and you're like, "I don't really want to eat another bat ball?"

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Yeah, this is a problem on the road, especially in Asia, because they see the show out there, it's very, very popular.

MARIO BATALI: They know you. They save you the special bit.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Yeah, here he comes. When I hear the words "something very special," it's like, "Oh. Penis, again?"

(laughter)

MARIO BATALI: Scrotum, my favorite.

BILL BUFORD: What were you eating in Namibia a couple weeks ago?

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Ah yes, staying with the Bushmen, who—they don't *grow* anything, they don't herd or raise cattle, they've essentially been doing hunting and gathering the same way for over ten thousand years. They don't even have feathers on their arrows. They creep up on animals within thirty feet, shoot them with these poisonous arrows, track them for two days across the desert. There's no water, there's nothing, maybe the occasional berry or fruit or Kalahari truffle. **(laughter)** There *are* truffles in the Kalahari, they're not like white Italians or black, but they're quite nice. 90 percent of their diet is. . .

MARIO BATALI: What do you eat them on?

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Pretty much, their cooking method is “dig hole in ground, throw object in.” Here I am, their honored guest. Their entire tribal hierarchy is based on the getting of meat and the distribution of meat within the tribal group, so when the chief saws the warthog head off, throws it into the sand, you know, onto the fire, covers it with sand, zips open the abdomen, scoops out around twenty pounds of crap onto the ground, of course, I’m honored guest, the last foot of intestine, which he’s squeezing out with the same hands he’s just, onto the fire, and that’s the part. Two and a half days it was not a single mouthful of food that I ate that did not have sand, fur, or crap in it. **(laughter)** Yeah, it’s good to be me.

BILL BUFORD: You’ve got a good gig, and I thought mine was good.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: So, before we take go to questions from the audience.

BILL BUFORD: Maybe I won’t steal that idea.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: The glamorization of chefs, this whole celebrity chef thing, is this some sort of twisted food porn, people staring at the tube, seeing people do things on camera that they’re not going to be doing themselves anytime soon?

MARIO BATALI: Absolutely.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Is this a good thing for a society, the celebrity chef thing, even at its most satanic, like Rachael Ray?

(laughter/applause)

MARIO BATALI: I was wondering when the insults were going to start popping out.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Forty dollars a day, sure. **(laughter)** *Tip, bitch!*

(laughter)

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Anyway, what was I saying? I'm a bitter man.

BILL BUFORD: I'm glad *you* said that.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Is it a good thing . . .

BILL BUFORD: Absolutely. Absolutely.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Even when you've, you know, looked deeply into the most horrifying examples, is it a good thing for society and the world?

BILL BUFORD: Tony, you've answered the question. It's obviously a great thing.

MARIO BATALI: I think we're in a luxury position, where we can afford to think more about our food than actually having to actually grow it or eat it and with that ability comes the necessary elevation to a certain art form and cooking has become an art form that has in a lot of people's minds, replaced, sadly, some of the more traditional art forms. It used to be you'd go to the opera and get a bite, go to the game and you'd get a bite, go to the concert and get a bite. Now, people can obsess about just going out to dinner as their *entire* evening, and that people think about that certainly works for me, but it's also a sign, it's a sign of a certain luxuriousness of our society, which will obviously mean at one time we'll hit the wall, crash, and die.

BILL BUFORD: There's a footnote to that, which is that there probably isn't, hasn't been a moment in our history when we've known as little about *food* as we do now, and that a lot of the interest in what goes on on a Food Network channel is born out of ignorance. The thing I think I learned from being with the butcher in Italy is that so many of us are meat eaters but we've got no idea of the animal that it comes from.

MARIO BATALI: How they kill.

BILL BUFORD: Not even how to kill it, but what the pieces are and—

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: But where it comes from.

BILL BUFORD: What it is and what you're going to do with it and to look at it and they're horrified that there's blood and that there's organs, and that there is a stomach and you've gotta squeeze out the intestines if you're going to put your sausage meat inside.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: And presumably wash it, too, that's really a plus, let me tell ya.

(laughter)

BILL BUFORD: Didn't seem like there was a lot of extra water. And one of the things that came out of my experience of working in the butcher shop was coming to understand where my food comes from and that could be the seasonal foods and knowing how to cook seasonally, and a lot of it was knowing what meat is, and if you're going to be a meat eater, I want to know that my meat comes from an animal, and I want to understand the animal, what's a good animal, and a bad animal, what's good meat, and bad meat, and that's a very fundamental kind of knowledge, and I think very, very few people have it and that kind of ignorance I think informs our fascination with food.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Speaking of organs, what about Charlie Trotter and the foie gras thing, gutless punk or not?

MARIO BATALI: At some point, you have to realize that you're at the top of the food chain and there's not much to deal with.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: What does this mean for us? They've just declared foie gras illegal in Chicago, to eat, to prepare, to sell.

MARIO BATALI: That's the government gone wrong, there must be something they can fix in Chicago besides foie gras.

(laughter)

BILL BUFORD: But, Tony, what's your view?

MARIO BATALI: Gutless punk, I can tell you right now.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Bad thing, really, really.

BILL BUFORD: Because—

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I'm obviously I'm very angry at Charlie. This is a chef of enormous stature, importance, and ability, and I think by coming out *against*, regardless of his personal view on the matter, he provided political cover for the forces of evil and darkness to take our foie away. **(laughter)** What next? What next? Next it's our cheese.

MARIO BATALI: We don't treat veal or chickens that well, either, so I mean, in the end, are we going to outlaw all the things that we grow to eat?

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Did you read the Whole Food thing? They're very—Whole Foods is talking about taking lobsters, and they're worried about their soft-shell crabs and their clams, and there are actually people writing them and telling them they should take the poor clams out of the tanks, they're being treated badly. You know, we're force-feeding people for Christ's sake, and people are suffering in any variety of means, battery chickens. And we're worried about mollusks?

(laughter)

MARIO BATALI: Well, there's so much light in those poor little caves.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: It just seems wrong. I mean, I see it as—on one hand, we have chefs empowered for whatever reasons we've discussed here, but on the other there are people taking our foie gras away, they're trying to make our food health and safety laws much more restrictive. You know, who's going to win in the end, is there hope for us, are things going to get better?

BILL BUFORD: Yes.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Mario, are you as optimistic?

MARIO BATALI: Yes, I am. No, hold it, you're the pessimist today?

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: No, there is, as long as you're out there, Mario, there is hope for this world.

MARIO BATALI: Exactly, thank you very much. And you.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: On this happy note there may be some questions from the audience.

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: There are mikes on both sides of the hall.

Q: You were talking before about chefs essentially setting food trends and knowing what we'll eat next. Who are the people setting it before that happens?

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Who do you think was deciding what? What you were going to eat? In my experience, before the celebrity chef phenomenon, when a chef walked into a restaurant and took over, you'd start to write your menu—he'd say, gotta have a steak, gotta have the salmon. Chicken Caesar, gotta have that, hate it, but gotta have it. Gee, there should probably be

a hamburger, delete a pasta. You know, you've eaten up 90 percent of your menu before you do one thing that's original, interesting, or personal.

BILL BUFORD: Actually you write about that in your book. As you're traveling across America, so many of the menus are made up by what people think that people want to eat.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: But increasingly, chefs, I've seen chefs slip it in, feeling just powerful enough to slip in *something*. In Minneapolis, there's a chef, a restaurant called Vincent's, very straightforward brasserie menu, but he has a little section of the menu called "Something Weird but Good," and it's great, because his regular customers, of which has many, who come in for the steak-frites three or four times a week, one day their eye drifts over to the "Something Weird but Good", and "Something Weird but Good" is always something very classic, traditional, old-school French, like tripe à la mode or pied de cochon or something like that and they say, "You know what? Today I'll give it a try." If there is hope in the world for me, it's that process. I mean, how did you get people to eat brains the first time?

MARIO BATALI: Put it on the menu.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Come on, you put it in ravioli, too.

MARIO BATALI: Exactly, you hide it. You sneak it around.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Or put a jumbo shrimp on top.

BILL BUFORD: To answer your question, I think that forty years ago, it wasn't necessarily chefs, it was more the tradition of a particular region that would decide it. There were people that wanted to go to the diner or the fast-food restaurant or the kind of local cuisine-y restaurant, that maybe anything like a grouper sandwich in Florida to Dungeness crab just steamed and served all by itself. And it was less chef-driven. That didn't mean that people didn't eat, though, I mean, they ate what they knew and what was presented to them by any different level of cooks or restaurateurs.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I'm fascinated by the precise moment in history that Americans decided it was okay to eat raw fish. I think it might have been the most important tipping point in American gastronomy. It went completely against the grain.

BILL BUFORD: I remember you talking about the first time you went to Italy, you couldn't get prosciutto in America, you couldn't get parmigiano in America and a lot of the things we take for granted now are really very, very recent and there's been a sort of codified American cuisine, as such, for almost for the whole century.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: But everything got better for all of us the moment people thought sushi was something we wanted to eat, it made it so much easier for Italian and French chefs. I mean, I couldn't sell squid before that, I couldn't—tuna, people really weren't eating it, they certainly didn't want it rare, mackerel, a lot of those great things we couldn't sell in French and Italian restaurants until the sushi barrier was broken. I don't know why that happened, really. It looked cool, people saw *Shogun* on TV, **(laughter)** I think ultimately it doesn't matter, you know, how we got there, but fortunately we got there.

Q: Two unrelated questions—One, is putting on weight an occupational hazard of being a chef **(laughter)** or do you think that when you see people like Paul Prudhomme or something, are these people who just loved food all their life and they would have been heavy even if they weren't chefs?

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: They're just not smoking enough. **(laughter)**

Q: Smoking *what*? The second question is deer. Is, deer, you don't see deer meat around that much, although there a lot of deer running around. Is it because it doesn't taste so good? Or is there some other reason?

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Venison?

BILL BUFORD: Plenty of deer. One of the reasons is you can't serve wild game in an American restaurant legally, it has to be farm-raised game. In Britain, you can serve wild game. And partly—there's a whole history to that, but in Britain it's because the people who own the game usually own the land and here the people who are shooting the game don't own the land. But the only stuff you can get is farm-raised and USDA-inspected. Although I do recall a moment when a friend of Mario's arrived with some deer.

MARIO BATALI: Yes, Bill, I'm thinking back too.

BILL BUFORD: It was good.

Q: I have a question for Mr. Batali. Bill Buford's book is not called *Kitchen Confidential*, but does have a number of secrets in it, I guess you could say, reveals some of the perhaps unsavory moments that might occur in your kitchen.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I didn't find anything unsavory about it.

Q: Perhaps not as unsavory as chefs might think might occur, but Mario Batali rooting through in the garbage, for example, for—

MARIO BATALI: Hardly rooting, just picking over the top. **(laughter)** What is my perception of *him*, is that your question?

Q: Well, kind of twofold, what is your perception of him, do you feel he's given away any secrets? And, second of all, it seems that whenever you do get any press, the lines form around the block at Babbo once again. Do you think that's going to happen with this book as well?

MARIO BATALI: My perception of Bill is that he is a very good writer. He has created an excellent book that makes me a little uncomfortable in the same way that standing in a very brightly lit room surrounded with mirrors would if I was naked and looked at it for seventeen hours in a row, I might feel that same queasiness, but he captured a good portion of the reality of

the not-so-Hollywood look of a real kitchen, he created a slightly more Machiavellian struggle for power than really exists in the real world, but it's a good book, and I don't think that it will hurt business at Babbo, and quite honestly when all of the hullabaloo about me saying fuck 743 in the book fades down it will be an interesting book in its own particular history written by a very perceptive and smart guy that will *not* hurt me, as silly as it seems, and how foolish it is to read it and see how stupid you sound when someone writes everything down that you say after three drinks.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I'd like to point out that the ancient art of garbology, by the way, is a completely legitimate practice dating back forever. The chef—you learn a lot from your trash, you learn what customers are eating and how much of it they are eating, what's not working. You also see what your cooks are throwing out. This is valuable information.

BILL BUFORD: And in this case, I was throwing out something that even I knew I shouldn't have been throwing out when I was throwing it out. It was very instructive for me. Don't waste it. And then he went around saying, "Don't waste that! Don't waste that!" Don't waste that!"

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: What's the first rule of French cooking? You know, use everything.

MARIO BATALI: Or the main rule of Babbo restaurant, which is we buy stuff, we fix it up, and we sell it.

Q: I have a two-part question and I'd like if possible for both Chef Bourdain and Chef Batali to answer it. First is, do you think that chefs who are screamers and tantrum-throwers, by nature, when they train other chefs, produce screamers, as opposed to people who might have come out of a culture of working at an inn or their parents' restaurant. And the second part of that question—do you think it's necessary? Do you think it's essential to running a kitchen? Chef Batali?

MARIO BATALI: I think that most of the screaming is really based on the self-loathing of the chef too foolish to realize that he should have or she should have trained the people that they're

screaming at to do the job under the pressure that they knew was inevitable at the beginning of the day. Every day we know that the restaurant's not going to be really busy at 5:30, at about 6:00 it's going to turn on, at about 7:30 all hell breaks loose, and what you have to establish is an acceptable window of variation. Not everything is going to be done exactly the same every day. And once you understand that you've trained the people to understand and see. "This is brown enough but this is too brown and that's not brown enough." And if you can get to there's a ten degree or a five degree or a three degree or whatever degree acceptable window of variation then that cook is empowered to do what the cook needs to do. And when you yell at them, it's because you realize that you totally messed up and you didn't train them to be ready at 8:00 for this kind of brown, and if it takes an extra six seconds to get that brown then take that extra six seconds or there will be screaming. Now I've found a way to really modify behavior that a slightly louder than hushed-voice lecture within earshot of three or four of your peers will do a lot more to change than screaming at them then having to come back and apologize fifteen minutes later, which is exactly what has to happen eventually.

BILL BUFORD: If I could add a footnote to that before. My one experience of the Babbo kitchen where I was in trouble was when Mario happened to wander in after being away for a month and looked at a piece of meat and it wasn't right and looked at another piece of meat and it wasn't right. And he went off to the other side of the kitchen and I heard this: "[growl] unacceptable! [growl] unbelievable! [growl]" And [pop] I was . . .

MARIO BATALI: You were removed from the grill.

BILL BUFORD: I was designated the guy to put salt and pepper on things.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: That hurts.

BILL BUFORD: It was very, very effective, there was no screaming. I was told in a French kitchen what they do is take your plate and they throw it on floor. [Snarl.] But Mario was just "[growl] unacceptable [growl]." I felt like shit.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Screamers definitely breed screamers. A lot of chefs came up old-school, very physical, very abusive. Gordon Ramsay, who's essentially playing who he was ten years ago, as a *character* now, came up in a very, very tough kitchen like that.

BILL BUFORD: Gordon came up with Marco Pierre White.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: With Marco. And you know, allegedly, if you were in the oven too long with your arm you got the oven door kicked closed on your arm or you get your head dunked in the pot sink, or worse.

MARIO BATALI: Marco was very charming.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Yeah. And there was a long and glorious tradition of that kind of yelling and screaming, which to outsiders is often terrifying. I don't know. I have a soft spot for that, in some ways, because it's nice to be of the Joe Torres school of kitchen management, meaning like Thomas Keller, for instance, where the cooks are so jacked, so happy they are—they already feel that they are on the mountaintop by even being in your kitchen that all you have to do is raise an eyebrow or not say goodnight to them at the end of the night and they go home in tears (**laughter**) contemplating hanging themselves in the shower stall. Which is more violent, really? (**laughter**) If you look at—it's really about manipulation and control, for the common good, presumably. What I can say about Gordon Ramsay being the most notorious example of the screaming school is that all of the people you see back in *Boiling Point*, shot back in the late nineties, it was front-page news, "Biggest Bully in England," "Worst Boss in England." All of those cooks you see getting screamed at, they're now running Gordon Ramsay restaurants around the world pulling down some serious coin and feeling—he is very loyal to them. No one—the bottom line for me is always this—no one should go home at the end of the shift feeling like a *fool* for working hard for someone, for giving them their loyalty, their sweat, their toil. Whatever happened during the shift, if you can't have a beer with that employee at the end of the night and laugh about it, then you've gone over the line. I think that's where I've always drawn the line.

BILL BUFORD: Were you a screamer?

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I have been known to raise my voice and there has been some crockery—dropped.

(laughter)

Q: Quick question—you had mentioned that there are four other chefs that you're waiting to kind of set off into the world. Is there something that you see that a chef has, that makes them special, and as an outsider, Bill, do you have that ability to see the same thing in that person, and is there a quality that you know makes people unsuccessful?

MARIO BATALI: I can tell in a five-minute interview whether someone will be able to work with me, even without ever seeing them cook, and it's because they have a particular shine or brightness to their eyes, and you can tell that they're just smart. Dumb people really have no place in my kitchen. **(laughter)** After cooking with them for a year or two, you can tell that they make decisions under fire that are laudable, that they make decisions that are for the good of the restaurant, for the satisfaction of the customer and for the safety and the happiness of the chef and if they make those decisions consistently you can tell that they are going to succeed in life and in business and *that's* how I reward them and that's, you know. There are people who get a long ways and then really make bad mistakes, and you give them another chance, and they do well and they do all right and they move along, or they make a really bad mistake and they continue to exacerbate it by being heinous or difficult to deal with or just not—the main event is to have happy cooks, the second main event is to have happy customers, and with one you have the other. If you have dissatisfied cooks, you rarely will have really happy customers. In the end it's about customer satisfaction, and that's really the goal.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Can you handle pressure? If you can handle pressure—it's wonderful to be able to cook brilliantly but can you handle pressure and can you cook wonderfully, *consistently*, every night.

MARIO BATALI: That's knowing the acceptable window of variation. That's understanding that it's not going to be *exactly* exactly the same if you want to do three hundred covers. If you're going to do forty covers a night or whatever number the French Laundry does, they do their one seating, and it gives them more precision and it gives them that ability to find that, that's not really what excites me about cooking.

BILL BUFORD: One of the things that was interesting for me is—I come from a literary background, and so this is my first exposure to working with cooks. It was fascinating how—well, on the one hand they go through a kind of training that's analogous to what an artist would go through, or someone training to be a writer. It's years and years and years of training, it's doing this job and that job and going to this job for experience. At the end of the day it's a very curious combination of things. On the one hand, it's just pure physical labor. It's standing on your feet and working very, very hard and on the other hand, there is a sense of aesthetic and creativity and mastery and it's this, I think it's this combination of real physical labor with this aesthetic sense which makes the profession very appealing.

MARIO BATALI: There's also the sense of immediate knowledge of your success. You send out a plate, it goes out, it comes back empty ten minutes later, you hit. You hit it, as opposed to a book, or even a salumist making a sausage and allowing it to hang for the year and at the end of the year you open it up and you realize “Oh shit, there was a bug in there, now the whole thing's rotten.” It took you a year to figure that out. One mistake you made it 364 days ago.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Somebody asked me earlier, do you miss the kitchen? That's exactly what I do miss. You know this well. You write a book or you make a TV show or whatever, you never *really* know, you know, regardless of what the Amazon number is, you never really know.

MARIO BATALI: What is your Amazon number today, Bill?

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: 23.

MARIO BATALI: 18, 23, all right.

BILL BUFORD: 23?

MARIO BATALI: He dropped since lunch.

BILL BUFORD: It's over. Father's Day is done.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: You never really know for sure how good the product is, but you know *absolutely* when you put that plate up in the window or at the end of the night when you're sitting at the bar with the cooks after you've done 350 meals, nothing's been returned, you know.

BILL BUFORD: That was a nice thing at Babbo, the runners would come back and show you the empty plates frequently. You'd do a nice thing and then they'd go, hm, you see, everything done.

MARIO BATALI: Or when they had more than 50 percent of the food. That was our requirement at Babbo. When something came back 50 percent or less eaten, they would show it to the chef, so we could not necessarily terrorize them but find out if there was in fact a problem with the dish or they didn't like it or whatever. Half the time it was, that fucking asshole didn't understand shit. But most of the time it was trying to find out if there's something we can get them or make them happier.

Q: I have two questions. One of them is my friend has a theory that if everybody worked in a restaurant, then maybe they'd not be such assholes when they attend them, **(laughter/applause)** well, I have the general question of if you agree with that—it's my statement, is, yes—and after working at Babbo, has that changed you when you go to restaurants, do you feel like you're just faster, or you're more compassionate, or less of a jerk.

(laughter)

BILL BUFORD: I'm more of a jerk. There is a Babbo experience which is very crucial, not that it would, I need to qualify this importantly, but one of the things I learned is that you don't want to be the last person in the restaurant, and it's not that they don't serve the food properly—

MARIO BATALI: That's a lie.

BILL BUFORD: But there is a cook's view, there is a cook's view, that if you're such an asshole to come in at the last sitting, especially if you're going to order the whole tasting menu.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: We hate you.

BILL BUFORD: They all gather around, waiting around the ticket machine [grumbling] and they all sort of share, they say, man, that's the last thing I'd do is be the last person, I'd never want to be the last. Don't want to be the last person. Of course, it's changed now, I'm sure.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I don't think anyone in the industry would not be really sensitive to that. The kitchen's trying to close and get out. You don't go in and order a three-course meal with a well-done rack of lamb at five minutes of midnight and you always tip 20 percent unless it's just unbelievably horrible service, restaurant people tip 20 across the board at least.

BILL BUFORD: The other part of your question.

Q: What's your favorite fat to cook with?

BILL BUFORD: Favorite fat.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Oh, man, that's a hot question.

MARIO BATALI: I like them all. I don't really like butter that much, but olive oil and lard are right there.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Pork or duck.

MARIO BATALI: Duck. Pork, it's gotta be pork.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Pork. I go with Homer Simpson, the pig is a magical animal.

(laughter)

Q: I have a question for Bill Buford. I feel you didn't spend enough time in your book on this and I wanted to know exactly when was the egg added to a pasta, no, I'm just kidding, the serious question—

BILL BUFORD: It was seven pages, I know. Thoroughly sated.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I think he covered that ground.

Q: The serious question, and I guess it's more for the writers, is one of the things it seems you try to do is get sort of the inside experience, what it's like to really *be* there, and then share that with the public and there must, I imagine, be some tension to that. And I remember reading in your book, Bill, about how, I forget the Italian woman's name who taught you how to make pasta . . .

BILL BUFORD: Betta.

Q: . . . at one point, said, right, said, "Don't tell Mario about this, this is our secret," and now of course it's in a book and not only Mario but the entire world knows, and I just wonder if—

BILL BUFORD: I haven't told him yet.

(laughter)

Q: He hasn't—Mario hasn't gotten that far?

BILL BUFORD: I didn't tell him. Betta told me, do not tell Mario what goes in our tortellini, and I haven't told him.

Q: But I just wonder generally, that role of going on the inside and learning and then also wanting to share with the public, how you sort of deal with that.

BILL BUFORD: Well, I hope I dealt with it respectfully and I was in an extremely privileged position, and Mario was extremely indulgent of me, allowing me in his kitchen without any supervision, just I'm there and either flail and fail or I flail and don't quite fail, and I was learning something every single day and every time I would turn in the kitchen I would go, "oh that's how you make that, oh, that's what you do with that, oh is that what you do with the Brussels sprouts," and *every* single day I was learning something and I would like to think that that you know, what I was really revealing was nothing more than how a kitchen works and it's different from what we think and it's more demanding and it's more aggressive and it's much coarser and starker than we think, but finally this was a place that made really good food and I was privileged enough to participate in that process. I hope I didn't . . .

MARIO BATALI: Did you have to write the word 752 times? **(laughter)**

Q: I ask this question because I'm hungry and I welcome lengthy description. But what will each of you have for dinner tonight? **(laughter)**

MARIO BATALI: It's in the hands of another master tonight. We're all eating together at Cesare Casella's restaurant, which is without a doubt one of the most true real Italian restaurants in all of New York. It will involve pork.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I've found that cooking professionally is about total control of the people around you, the food, the physical forces of the universe that control food, your environment, your *mise en place* which is of course a religion, it's all about *dominance*. Eating for chefs at its best, when we're happiest, is about complete submission. I'm guessing we're

showing up and saying, Cesare, cook for us, I don't want to have to be analytical, I don't want to use that part of my brain, I don't want to think about it. I'm guessing I'm going to eat a lot.

BILL BUFORD: Which a chef would understand, which Cesare would understand.

MARIO BATALI: Which will give rise to the fact when anybody asks me what my favorite thing to eat, my favorite thing to eat is anything anyone else cooks.

(laughter)

BILL BUFORD: Which is why he came to dinner in the first place. He didn't know that when he got there he was then going to then have to make it.

Q: Hi. I know when the times I've been to Babbo and Otto one of the really cool features is the abundance of rock music, often seventies-inspired. I watch *No Reservations*, Anthony, and I see you're always rocking your, like, Ramones and Jane's Addiction shirts. I'm just wondering for all you guys, what's on your iPods lately?

MARIO BATALI: I'll start. Probably my favorite two records of the last six months is the new Les Reconteurs album, which is the guy from the White Stripes with another singer and what would be another one, oh the new Red Hot Chili Peppers, which of course my kids absolutely love to death and to hear my son Leo, with his little iPod headphones on, mis-singing the words to "Dani California," it's like "California, cut the cheese," it's unbelievably beautiful.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Brian Jonestown Massacre, which I'm really into lately, and the greatest album ever made, *Fun House* by the Stooges.

Q: I would concur.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: One of the things, by the way, that I truly love about Babbo is that you walk in there eleven o'clock at night and they're playing "Gimme Shelter" at a painful

volume and customers are crying to the waiter and Mario's sitting across the street on his stoop, and all the customers are, "Can't you turn it down?" "No, Mario's here, man, if I turn it down, I'll get fired." I really, really admire that.

MARIO BATALI: Actually, it's three customers that are complaining and everyone else is thinking, we are in a very loud and hip place. And it's fun.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Yes, it is.

Q: I have a question about the racial politics of the kitchen and the differences between who buses dishes, who cooks, who's at the front of the house, especially in a city like New York, and just what you all think of that and about what's become almost an impermeable barrier between—you know, it's hard for someone to work their way up and to cross that line sometimes and, you know, you don't see a lot of chefs of color breaking into that celebrity chef realm.

BILL BUFORD: Tony's written rather well about that.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I think you're absolutely right. It's kind of inexplicable to me. The restaurant business, particularly the kitchen end, has historically for hundreds of years been one of the most welcoming workplaces for everyone. In Europe, in France, all of the bistros, the brasseries, were staffed by people from every country, every background, and certainly it's been welcoming at certain levels, it's certainly, the Latino contingent has been if anything overrepresented numerically. African-Americans are certainly underrepresented. It's something I've talked to a lot of other people about. I think Michael Ruhlman wrote a really interesting piece about it in the *Times*. It's a real hot-button issue that no one really wants to look at or talk seriously about. I have very mixed feelings. It's something I guess I'd probably want to have a long and drunken conversation about.

Something, I guess, that I feel personally a little more comfortable talking about and more strongly about is I *do* know that somewhere between 17 and 70 percent of the workforce in restaurants are Latino—they're Mexican, Ecuadorian, these are the people who mentored me.

Every time, you're a white kid, you come out of culinary school, chances are the strongest guy in the kitchen is a Latino guy who's been there for the longest period of time, knows what's going on, and that's who your rabbi is in the kitchen, so it's kind of a pet issue for me. I had my James Beard epiphany. I was presenting an award at the James Beard House a few years ago. I stood up on that stage and I looked out at the audience and I've never seen so many white people in my life in one room and this is an organization that claims to love the restaurant business, to celebrate chefs and the people who work in the restaurant business, and as we all know, who's keeping us all afloat, so whatever you might feel about the immigration issue with Mexico in particular it seems to me that at the very least an honest place to *begin* the conversation is to recognize and acknowledge who's working here *now*, and that's the only I think semi-intelligent thing I can say on the subject.

Q: Hi. I'm curious of your opinion on why it seems that is certainly furthered in the book, why all serious chefs have to go to Europe to study food. Why is it that you can't learn how to really cook here in America. Is it the quality of food over there? Is it the philosophy of food? Is it the culture, the history, you know, what is it about learning to cook from Betta that Mario can't teach you, or an equivalent?

BILL BUFORD: In part what I was describing was a European cooking tradition, if it was a Japanese restaurant, it would obviously be a different situation. But it's a—you know, Mario's restaurant *is* a European restaurant, it's a restaurant inspired by Italian cooking, and there's really only so much you can learn here in New York, where you're surrounded by American cooking traditions and American practices. But finally there was a much bigger issue for me, which was by removing myself from the city and going to a hill town in Chianti, I was really participating in an agrarian tradition and was working with people who made handmade food very simply, according to the seasons, according to traditions that went back for centuries, and you don't learn that in Manhattan, it's just not *old* enough, and I felt I was connecting to something much bigger than myself by doing it. And was very grateful for the experience. Mario's the example for everybody in that kitchen. Mario had a perfectly serious highly accomplished cooking career and stopped everything and went to Italy and spent several years in Italy and learned all this stuff which is just learning how to use your hands in a different way.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I don't think you need to go but it helps, what do you think?

MARIO BATALI: I think that if you really want to operate a restaurant that is based on a cuisine that isn't American, you really have to spend time there, if you really want to understand it, and a lot of it is just removing a lot of the white noise that is part of the problem of the translator. When you eat beef cheek raviolis with crushed squab liver and black truffles, believe me there is no dish like that in Italy, it would be the beef cheek ravioli with butter and sage. And so you have to go find that for yourself so you know the self-evident truth of the actual simplicity of the real basis for the thought of the dish and then from that point you can become your John Coltrane and play on it but you have to see it in its purity first to see it and understand it or you're learning from people who have learned from someone else who's learned from someone else, which is a different kind of a knowledge. It's not bad. You can learn to cook very well in America.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: I think we're going to do one more question, because I need a cigarette.

Q: You mention in your book, Mr. Buford, that you felt that people were maybe losing the art of hand making food like when you were in Italy the lady that was teaching you how to make pasta was having problems finding a *pastina* to come in in the morning and roll out pasta, even in tradition-bound Italy. Do you see that as a trend that's happening more and more worldwide? Do you see a loss of maybe artisanal handmade food, or actually a resurgence?

BILL BUFORD: One of the nice things of the place that we ended up in Panzano—which is different from Zibello, which is where you couldn't get a *pastina*—is that it was a community where the *contadina*, the farmers, had all left. They deserted the place and it went into a kind of a collapse. Chianti went into a kind of collapse, and now it's going through a resurgence. It's a very calculated resurgence. It's not the Slow Food movement, but it's not unrelated to the Slow Food movement. It's a generation of people who recognize what good food is and, in their way—often it's very expensive, they're trying to do it at a real cost—in their way, they're trying

to revive it, and we left feeling extremely hopeful and educated and thought there were things that we got from this experience that we can apply here and it informs the way we go to the Greenmarket and how we put a pig on our Vespa and things like that.

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Bill, thank you, and can I encourage everyone to buy his book. Don Mario. Time for a smoke!

(applause)