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A humorous narrative about the flavor of Italian culture in South Philadelphia, *Gravy Wars* describes a way of life that is unique to the region where gravy, a.k.a. tomato sauce, is a distinct hallmark. Italian immigrants in other parts of the United States scoff at its usage. Rather than acquiesce to the common term for sauce, however, this sector of Americana takes pride in the moniker and readily defends it.

Most Italian-Americans are competitive when it comes to culinary skills, especially when it comes to preparing gravy. In a comically deprecating style, *Gravy Wars* exposes this and many other idiosyncrasies characteristic of South Philadelphians. In addition to a heap of nostalgia, the book includes dozens of family recipes split among eleven chapters in categories that relate to each chapter's topic.

Chapter Overview

Preface

Gravy Wars—A Live Broadcast

The preface describes a radio bit as it unfolded during the morning drive program of a major Philadelphia radio station where Lorraine was co-hosting with Chris McCoy. The gravy subject was brought up and Chris called Mrs. Ranalli, instigating a challenge between mother and daughter. Proceeding with the description of the on-air gravy contest, this and the opening chapters set the stage for the stories in the book.

Chapter I

An Eye For Taste

The first chapter opens with a discussion of the age-old Philly region debate over the use of the term gravy vs. sauce. It is the only place in the book where the truth is revealed—that gravy is a term unique only to South Philly Italians. Lorraine offers theories as to how the term came to fruition. Subtitles in this chapter offer advice for following the recipes in the book.

Chapter II

How Wars Are Started

Dialogue around the Sunday dinner table offers readers a taste of typical family dynamics. In addition to character traits, the “big secret” is divulged in this chapter—that the main difference from one pot of gravy to another is largely attitudinal. 17 family gravy and meat recipes follow *How Wars are Started*.

Chapter III

Breeding

Insight into the self-image and traditions of Italian immigrants who settled in Philadelphia in the early part of the twentieth century is revealed through the introduction of Lorraine’s fraternal grandparents, their struggles, and their legacy. From language barriers and economic difficulties to a sense of family and community, most Americans will identify with this nostalgic account. Eight impressive meals that can be prepared without much effort are included at the end of this chapter. They’re referred to as *Old Standbys*.

Chapter IV

Once Removed ...Migrating to the Suburbs

As the title suggests, this is the story of a family’s big move out of the city—a whole four miles away—during the second half of the twentieth century. With amusing sarcasm, Lorraine offers a detailed description of the “Little South Philly Italy” in which she was raised. No longer able to walk to a relative’s house, transportation by auto, although still novel, had become a necessity. Six “heavy duty” pasta recipes accompany this chapter. They are the special pasta dishes that are served when the whole family gets together.

Chapter V

Malocchio . . . Stay Outta My Kitchen!

Every culture has superstitions that distinguish it from other cultures. They can be regarded as something to fear or something to laugh about. Chapter five offers a subjective historical explanation of the many traditionally Italian superstitions, including the most dreaded malocchio, or evil eye. Like recipes, Italians disagree on either the meaning or history of these superstitions. *Malocchio* also addresses the consequences philandering Italian men have to face. For this reason, side dish recipes are included in chapter five.

Chapter VI

“Fungu” Shui

Hiding behind poetic license in the assumption that most readers will know the meaning of the first word in the title of this chapter, Lorraine does not offer a translation. However, feng shui, the term obviously being mimicked by the chapter title, is defined. As though you are sticking to plastic

slipcovers, you will adjust your posture while reading this hilarious description of the interior décor typical of Italian-American homes in the early 1970s. Pride in decorating ranks right up there with food preparation in this culture, so the recipes included are listed under the category *Italian Soul Food*.

Chapter VII

From Velour to Valor

From Velour to Valor recounts Lorraine's experience as a celebrity judge during a "sandwich make off" at Philadelphia's swanky Bellevue Hyatt Hotel. Describing a chef's dejection to having lost one of two awards demonstrates the extreme competitiveness and pride that is indicative of Italian men, not just women. Because this chapter's setting is a sandwich contest, a dozen *Panini*, *Pizza* and *Stromboli* recipes are included.

Chapter VIII

Dolce Vita

Italians do not serve dessert. Instead, they prepare a sweet table. Nine tempting recipes, which will entice readers to consider living the "sweet life," follow a self-deprecating account of martyrdom in the kitchen. This chapter mocks a prideful resistance to boxed cakes.

Chapter IX

One Fish, Two Fish, Crostaceo is Still Fish! –La Vigilia

Italians are known for their traditional seven fish feast on Christmas Eve, but is this really an *Italian* tradition? Several theories are argued, but the fact that Italians serve an abundance of food to their guests is never disputed. Observing that the farther anyone strays from his birthplace the more diluted family traditions become, this chapter evaluates the metamorphosis of a traditional Christmas Eve.

Chapter X

Silence of the Lamb

Curiously enough, Lorraine's parents never established a customary Easter Sunday dinner. She admits that she was only vaguely familiar with Italian customs at Easter until conducting research and interviews for this book. Responding to Lorraine's inquisition as to why her family wasn't raised eating lamb on Easter Sunday, Mrs. Ranalli responded, "Go ask your father." Mr. Ranalli, it turns out, was just a boy when a sunny spring day on a farm became an indelible memory that inadvertently created in him a permanent aversion to lamb. *Silence of the Lamb* describes that fateful day. Three recipes that are an Easter tradition in the Ranalli family follow the story.

Chapter XI

Ciao! Hello, Goodbye, and What's to Eat?

The wit that is laced throughout this book is wrapped up in the closing chapter. It takes you right into the glossary by addressing semantics, specifically, the word "ciao," which in Italian can mean *hello* or *goodbye*. The English pronunciation is chow, the slang term for food, which, ironically meshes with the theme of the book. Chapter eleven offers sage advice for interacting with Italian-Americans. It concludes with *One for the Road*—an original cocktail recipe.

Glossary

Italian-American vernacular in South Philly varies as greatly as the many dialects in Italy. Although each is based on actual Italian words, pronunciations and, frequently, the meanings are lost in translation. Glossary terms are listed according to their South Philly pronunciation. Two parallel columns offer the corresponding Italian word and the translation or definition.

Appendix

Complete with instructions, the appendix is an informal invitation for you to submit your recipes and stories for the *Gravy Wars* sequel.