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BELIEVE IT OR NOT

AUTHOR STACY HORN EXPLORES A LABORATORY'S INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE PARANORMAL

by Renée Alfuso / CAS '06

On January 15, 1949, a 13-year-old Maryland boy began demonstrating disturbing behavior—he would projectile vomit and speak in foreign languages, his bed shook violently, and words appeared scratched into his body. If the events sound familiar it's because they would later become the basis for the classic horror film *The Exorcist* (1973) and, sure enough, the boy's deeply religious mother was convinced that he was possessed by a demon. But a priest who witnessed the episodes firsthand believed a poltergeist was more likely to blame, and so he turned to a higher authority: the Parapsychology Laboratory at Duke University.

When J.B. Rhine, who headed the lab, learned of the strange case,

he supposed yet another theory: The boy himself was behind the phenomena, whether through simple trickery or perhaps psychokinesis (the ability to move objects via brainpower). Rhine, considered “the Einstein of the paranormal,” believed more in the abilities of the human mind than he did in ghosts. He struggled his whole life to bring psychical research away from the fringe and into the realm of science, and is the central character of *Unbelievable: Investigations Into Ghosts, Poltergeists, Telepathy, and Other Unseen Phenomena From the Duke Parapsychology Laboratory* (Ecco), a new book by Stacy Horn (TSOA '89). Using exhaustive research and countless interviews, Horn chronicles the lab's work, from 1930 to 1980, and vividly describes

the scientists' juiciest encounters, from the bizarre (a telepathic horse named Lady Wonder) to the heartbreaking (a fame-hungry psychic who strung along the parents of a missing boy).

A frequent contributor to NPR's *All Things Considered*, Horn was drawn to the once-prominent lab by her fascination with forgotten stories, which gives her writing the tone of investigative journalism despite a background in telecommunications. Where many would dread the labor of sorting through dusty piles of documents, Horn sees opportunity. Her previous book, *The Restless Sleep: Inside New York City's Cold Case Squad* (Viking), required digging through warehouses of evidence, and she recalls feeling like “a kid in a morbid candy shop.”

DUKE SCIENTISTS OF THE PAST
REVIEW RESULTS OF A PSYCHOKINESIS
TEST USING A DICE MACHINE.

So the chance to rummage through the Duke lab's 700 boxes of archives—which took almost three years—was especially appealing. “If there’s a basement that nobody’s gone into for decades, I want to go through that door and look at what nobody has for 100 years,” she says.

Horn’s interest in Rhine’s work put her in good company: Helen Keller, Aldous Huxley, Richard Nixon, Jackie Gleason, and Carl Jung were among the many who wrote and visited the lab. In the 1930s and ’40s, particularly following WWII, people desperately wanted proof of life after death and sought out mediums to reach their dearly departed. The burning question for Rhine was whether such seers were actually communicating with the dead or simply getting their answers through extrasensory perception (ESP). He decided the first step was to focus on telepathy—the ability of the mind to communicate with another. Eventually Rhine and his colleagues were testing up to 100 people for ESP each week using simple card experiments. By 1940, the lab had conducted nearly a million trials, which provided statistical evidence that the mind could exhibit telepathic powers. “Instead of bowing before the unexplainable, we begin to experiment with it,” Rhine observed.

But the public, and even the lab’s financiers, weren’t interested in science. Hundreds of letters poured in each day from people hungry for answers to inexplicable experiences—and they wanted someone to investigate them. Rhine was reluctant to start chasing after things that go bump in the night, but a 13-year survey of the letters, which eventually totaled more than 30,000, found that 3 percent of the stories could not be explained by his telepathy theo-

ries. These “spontaneous psychic experiences,” as the lab carefully dubbed them, showed possible evidence of “incorporeal personal agency”—their scientific term for ghosts. The only way to study them was to venture into the field.

Horn went to Duke expecting to uncover the real-life *Ghostbusters*. But, unlike in the movie, the lab’s task was not as simple as showing up with a proton pack and ghost trap. In most cases, the reported disturbances would cease before the scientists arrived. Perhaps the most elusive was the poltergeist—which means “noisy ghost” and is often exhibited by flying objects and slamming doors—because they seldom last long. But the activity can be prolific, as one Long Island family discovered in 1958, when they were startled by loud popping noises and found a crucifix fallen from the wall, broken toys strewn about, and bottles, including one containing holy water, unscrewed and emptied. Five weeks and some 67 events later, it stopped as abruptly as it began.

Over the years, the lab debunked thousands of reported ghosts and psychics, but some incidents remained beyond explanation. As decades passed, the lab’s friends and contributors died without knowing for certain whether an afterlife awaited them. Eventually the university grew less interested in parapsychology and the lab separated from Duke in 1962. When Rhine died in 1980, at 84, his work had never been fully accepted by the disbelieving scientific community, despite years of adherence to modern experimental procedure. Like Rhine, Horn is skeptical about ghosts but believes that there are happenings we can’t fully explain—yet. “I don’t know that it’s something from the afterlife, but it could be something *even more* interesting,” she says. “And to me that’s just as thrilling as a paranormal explanation.” ■

■ bibliofile

INVISIBLE HANDS: THE MAKING OF THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT FROM THE NEW DEAL TO REAGAN

(W.W. NORTON)

KIM PHILLIPS-FEIN
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
GALLATIN SCHOOL OF
INDIVIDUALIZED STUDY



Economist Adam Smith wrote that an “invisible hand” self-regulates the free market. Political scientist and historian Kim Phillips-Fein alludes to that unseen force, describing how little-known academics and businessmen—notably Lemuel Boulware of General Electric—worked behind the political curtain to create a conservative movement rooted in deregulation. The author illuminates the birth of modern conservatism in the 1930s as a reactionary crusade of those who, enraged by government regulation in the New Deal, funneled money and energy into promoting a return to *laissez-faire* economics. This paved the way to deregulation and the trickle-down theories of the ’80s. Phillips-Fein delivers a remarkably neutral—and timely—history as our government once again navigates its role in resolving a financial crisis. —Kevin Fallon

BLUEGRASS: A TRUE STORY OF MURDER IN KENTUCKY

(FREE PRESS)

WILLIAM VAN METER
LS '96, GAL '98



After a night of revelry in 2003, Western Kentucky University freshman Katie Autry passed out in her dorm room, where she was then raped, beaten, and charred from her thighs to her neck. With a newspaperman’s matter-of-factness, journalist William Van Meter details this gruesome tale, piecing together the alcohol-hazed events leading up to the murder, the bungled investigation by campus police, and the Autry family’s quest for justice. The case caused a sensation in Bowling Green, home to the university, and Autry—described variously as the sweetest girl ever and a promiscuous partier—was impugned in the local press nearly as much as the two troubled young men accused of the crime. While Autry was the obvious victim, it’s clear that the whole town suffered a loss of innocence with her passing. —Nicole Pezold

DIY Haute Cuisine

FLORENCE FABRICANT SHARES RECIPES, TIPS, AND TRENDS FROM NEW YORK'S BEST CHEFS

by Andrea Crawford

The New York City restaurant scene has had such an influence on Florence Fabricant's life that when she speaks of her love for the "kitchen," it's difficult to distinguish between the one at home and those in restaurants. As *The New York Times* food writer explains in her latest book, *The New York Restaurant Cookbook: Recipes From the City's Best Chefs* (Rizzoli): "Do I go out to dinner or light a stove? No contest for some people, but a dilemma for me."

But Fabricant's ninth cookbook offers a compromise: restaurant-caliber food that one can make at home. Published earlier this year, the book is a revised and updated edition of one that appeared six years ago and is as much a snapshot of the city's vibrant dining scene at a particular point in time as a compendium of recipes. "The hip, downtown, casual dining scene, particularly in Brooklyn and the East Village, has ramped up and has in some measure infiltrated other neighborhoods," says Fabricant (GSAS '62). Most important, though, the food is changing. "The

general quality is continuing to improve and there's more experimentation than ever," she says, nodding to the use of more locally produced food options.

In this edition, 30 new recipes—from the chefs of such newcomers as Momofuku, Telepan, Lunetta,

and The Grocery—appear alongside classics from Bouley, Babbo, Carnegie Deli, the Four Seasons, Pearl Oyster Bar, and more. One new addition, chicken potpie from the Waverly Inn, the author says, is probably the best you'll ever taste. Fabricant has mediated the con-

DAVID CHANG, ONE OF SEVERAL CHEFS FEATURED IN THE BOOK, OWNS FOUR NYC RESTAURANTS, INCLUDING MOMOFUKU SSÂM BAR (LEFT). RAMEN (ABOVE) IS ONE OF CHANG'S SIGNATURE DISHES.

coctions for domestic use. "I took these recipes, and I wrestled them to the ground," she says. "Many had to be pared down, slimmed, and trimmed to accommodate a home cook's needs, abilities, and lack of staff." Wine pairings (or other drink suggestions) accompa-

NEW YORK FOOD THE ANNALS OF CITY EATING

Annie Hauck-Lawson (GAL '83, STEINHARDT '91) wants New Yorkers to know their food history. In *Gastropolis: Food & New York City* (Columbia University Press), she and co-editor Jonathan Deutsch (STEINHARDT '04) compiled a collection of essays on the eating and drinking habits of city residents—from the Lenape Native Americans to today.

DID YOU KNOW?

► Cheesecake may date to 15th-century Europe, but it took off in New York after restaurateurs started using cream cheese, a concoction of cream and whole milk developed by a Chester, New York, dairy farmer in 1872.

► Gennaro Lombardi opened the first New York pizzeria in 1905.

► In 1916, Nathan Handwerker opened his hot dog stand a block from the beach at Coney Is-

land. To attract customers, he employed an unusual marketing strategy: He hired people dressed as doctors and nurses to stand out front and eat his frankfurters.

► The bagel was not popular in NYC until after World War II. But it supposedly originated in Vienna, Austria, in 1683, when a Jewish baker made them in gratitude to the Polish king, who loved to ride horses. The round shape is said to resemble a riding stirrup—a *Bügel* in German.

ny each entry, and Fabricant sprinkles the text with simple but important tips she has learned from her years of observing professionals.

Adventurous home cooks have long been interested in replicating what they discover while eating out. And although some chefs have been more likely to keep their secret sauces secret—prompting some diners to smuggle samples out for analysis—

others have willingly shared them, long before today's emphasis on celebrity chefs and their preponderance of cookbooks.

“When it comes to any kind of new food product, it's the chefs who discover them, by and large, it's in the restaurants that people eat them, and then they want them at home,” Fabricant says. “We would not have arugula in supermarkets were it not for restaurants.” ■

VEGAN FOOD GETS SOULFUL

If the idea of vegan soul food sounds like a radical departure, that's because it was meant to. Food activist, chef, and writer Bryant Terry (GSAS '01)—incidentally, not a vegan himself—presents a more sustainable and healthy approach to soul cooking in his new book, *Vegan Soul Kitchen: Fresh, Healthy, and Creative African-American Cuisine* (Da Capo). “It's important for me to tell these stories that depart from this very reductionist understanding of what African-American cuisines are,” the author says.

In order to create a more diverse and complex depiction of soul food, Terry, who studied history at NYU, drew heavily on the past and was inspired by Edna Lewis, whose cookbook, *The Taste of Country Cooking*, deeply influenced him. “It reads more like a memoir that's infused with recipes,” Terry says. Raised on the food he helped his grandparents grow and prepare in Memphis, Terry includes more than 150 recipes in this follow-up to *Grub: Ideas for an Urban Organic Kitchen* (Tarcher) (co-authored with Anna Lappé in 2006). There's everything from the bread and butter of soul food (collards, grits, cornbread) to inventive takes on watermelon (a martini, slushee, sorbet, and citrus and spice pickled rind), corn (sweet coconut-ginger creamed corn), and succotash (blackened tofu with succotash salsa).

And because he loves music as much as food, a soundtrack selection is suggested for each recipe. What goes with garlic broth? “Stormy Weather” by Etta James, of course. —A.C.

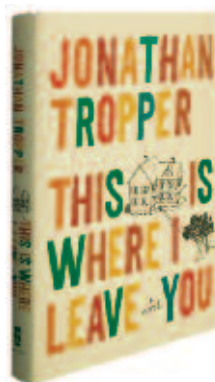


FOOD ACTIVIST AND AUTHOR BRYANT TERRY

PHOTO © SARA REMINGTON

bibliofile

THIS IS WHERE I LEAVE YOU
(DUTTON ADULT)
JONATHAN TROPPEL
GSAS '93



Jonathan Tropper's latest novel has all the trappings of an outrageous comedy: death, adultery, and disillusion. When Judd Foxman's father dies, the whole estranged family gathers at their Long Island home to sit shivah for an uncomfortable seven days. But the loss of a distant father is not the only problem plaguing Judd; his wife has just left him for his boss, and may or may not be pregnant with Judd's child. His siblings only complicate matters: older brother Paul despises Judd, Wendy is in a dead-end marriage of her own, and the youngest, Phillip, remains a teenager at heart. Add in their oversharing therapist mother, and the domestic tension boils to the point of both laughter and tears. *Publishers Weekly* proclaimed the book, “Sharp, raw, and often laugh-out-loud funny.”

—Emily Nonko

BEAT
(PERMANENT PRESS)
AMY BOAZ
GSAS '91



In this lyrical novella, a mother flees to Paris to escape both the drudgery of an unfulfilling marriage and the fallout of a passionate affair. Frances, a New York magazine editor and our narrator, drags her young daughter, Cathy, from the Louvre to many cafés, and the pair is constantly at odds. Frances is consumed by memories of her lover, Joseph, a rugged Beat poet from Boulder, and she contemplates how deeply their free-wheeling romance has alienated her from her prim East Coast family. What Cathy doesn't know is that Joseph's common-law wife, a domineering star poet, has mysteriously disappeared—and her mother is a potential suspect. Part mystery, part romance, Amy Boaz's book is an intricate, satisfying yarn, even if some strands are left to hang loose. —E.N.