

... from *Macaroni and Cheese Manifesto* (Third Edition)  
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## Macaroni and Cheese Manifesto

We are what we eat, it's been said.

Well, as long as I can remember, I've been eating macaroni and cheese.

One of my earliest food memories is the big, bright-orange block of cheese sitting next to the gunk pot on the splattered stove in our apartment's yellowing speck-of-a-kitchen.

Big, bright-orange, purple-stamped block of government surplus, it was—ever-present prop whose shavings fed the ever-present pot.

Occasional visitors could hardly conceal the “what the hell is that!” expressions on their faces.

In those days only welfare recipients *made* macaroni and cheese. Everyone else just stirred up the processed kind.

The Great Society provided sustenance in shocking dimensions—was the intention to feed or shame us?

We usually felt ashamed.

Nevertheless, we hunkered protectively over our sweat-seasoned bowls eating, as we were scolded, “like there was no tomorrow.”

\* \* \*

Other early food memories revolve around occasional outings to Horn & Hardart—never-since-surpassed nexus of industrial and culinary efficiency—gleaming steel counters and clattering trays, shining tile floors and revolving beehive food dispensers.

We always got the macaroni and cheese, which had a baked, golden-brown crust that we couldn't get at home.

And because each of us had his own dish from the beginning, and because you had to pay before you could eat, we ate there, usually, without much anxiety.

\* \* \*

Yet the high point of our experience with macaroni and cheese was that rare trip to Pippo's—there we would quickly gobble three or four baskets of bread and butter, then linger over orders of baked ziti and ravioli.

The owner knew us.

These were the only meals of childhood that I remember eating slowly.

\* \* \*

Wandering through my kitchen today one hardly notices either the speckled cheese roundlets sitting on the marble platter near the microwave, or the small library of cookbooks on the counter adjacent to the gas range.

Perusing a title recently I was reminded of a recipe that I had seen en route to the West Coast, in one of those in-flight magazines offered between hors d'oeuvres and entrée.

A recipe for macaroni and cheese.

“What the hell is this?” I remember thinking—macaroni and cheese evolved from staple to gourmet preparation.

The revelation had jarred then subdued me, like news of the demise of a childhood friend.

I stand in my kitchen today the remainder of an improbable journey up the food chain.

We are what we eat, it's been said.

But it's also been said, and so it would seem, that the cheese stands alone.

The cheese stands alone.

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