

Greek Cuisine On A Budget

Introduction

College cuisine is notorious for the ubiquitous Raman noodles and customary late night runs to Taco Bell. It seems an obligation of sorts to eat as much pollutant food as one can contain and to degrade the body with pre-packaged fats. Those who struggle to maintain a toxic-free sustenance are faced with the overpriced “organic” vegetables and “all natural” pastas that yet again have been sprayed with a pesticide or reside in a box made out of “recycled” materials. This proves problematic because once again we are being enticed as consumers into something that is not whole-heartedly beneficial. For the typical college student, home cooked meals are hard to come by; dormitory food is often every bit as unnatural as that of most fast food restaurants. However, for those privileged enough to live in off campus housing or who are finally making it into the “real” world, without parental or cafeteria-style meals, there are ample ways to create tasty dishes under a budget. Once an individual has had the taste of naturally homemade meals, how can the body *not* revolt against the common offerings of cafeterias and take-out?

Last summer, I spent three weeks on the island of Thassos, Greece discovering, eating, and savoring life. Immersing myself under the cool seawater and climbing out onto the rocky shore I was met not only by great natural beauty but also great natural food. Leaves the size of my pinky that is found along the roads, when seasoned with olive oil and salt, became a curiously fresh snack. This surprise led me to investigate the culinary value and opportunities that were right outside my hotel room and underneath the relentless sun. Every night divine meals were placed before me, but it was done with such casual ease that it made me wonder why, back home, I had wasted my time and calorie count gorging on a bag of Cheetos or premade fish

sticks. I began to think that I could easily create something that is not only rejuvenating for my body but also economically smart.

Sitting amongst the locals, you can gain a lot of knowledge simply by looking at the dishes that are readily served and prepared. The heady scents of basil are enough to encapsulate the simple pleasures that can be afforded from this slice of paradise. I was struck with the question as to why I could not replicate this kind of healthy and satisfying food in my own kitchen -- all the while taking into consideration that I am broke, jobless, and therefore possibly trapped within a typical cycle of bad food. The first item of consideration is the type of meal you are wanting, combined with the resources that are at hand in your town. This list of recipes will not only cause you to be a "more desirable dinner companion," but it will also aide in creating meals that will strengthen your body. But first, let me introduce you to Paradise.

*** Prisimi ***

The waves crashed against the mermaid rock some two hundred yards off shore, while the resounding tones roared across, up, and over the weathered stones that comprise the goat path to the beach. The moonlight cast its glow out on the scene, and for a moment I could actually feel something of the horrific beauty of the brief and dramatic storm.

The beach was comprised of thousands of stones that seemed intent to puncture and pinch uncovered feet and toes. A sheer cliff rose up from these stones where our precarious goat path could be navigated to reach the El Greco, where I had a small and simple room. This path was not paved, though a handrail had been placed intermittently along its length. One misstep and a rock would roll from beneath your feet, threatening to send you tumbling after it. Trees rose above the path and lay scattered across the rolling, steep knoll. On the beach, the stones gradually transitioned underneath surprisingly warm, surprisingly salty water, where the emerald

sheet of the surface would reflect the moods of the heavens.

Miniature jetties protruded along the edge of the sea, protecting the weathered metal ladder where one could ascend and jump off of a smooth rock that could hold just one diver at a time. If you were careful enough, you could scale down from any of several little cottages, and plop yourself into one of these cool fingers. You would need even greater care in avoiding the sea urchins that hungrily awaited uncovered flesh.

This particular morning felt like the world was being alternately stretched and contracted against its will. As the clouds doused the moon, the rain began to fall in quick bursts. I was perched above this vivid scene, languishing in the hotel tavern. Propping my feet against a glass table, I watched and listened as the wind created its own melody of discord. Light spray caressed my face, dotting rain kissed across my nose. The tree that held the little oranges — so unassuming on the outside, yet bursting with juice within — was swaying in time to the hammering clap of the wind.

Ecstasy and desire filled my stomach, making the tingling pulse in time to the lightning bolts that met the sea. Each crack of the air stirred the dozens of feral cats into a frenzy, pacing up and down the barren tables and huddling against the grapevines that festooned the chipped and worn trellis. The breeze whipped against my face, contradicting my breathing. While the stones were being smoothed by the inferno like sea, the hammering of the endless exotic lights too was refreshing for my soul. Searching for some purpose, my heart did not fall this time, instead it felt the ecstasy of the impossible. The pounding drops of opaque liquid refreshed my soul and removed the harmolypi, beautiful sadness, which held me prisoner. No longer was I a slave to the mystery of Thassos, this pull that drew the lost into its endless mysteries. The independence was blooming within me, stemming from the darkness that brought terror to those

with no imagination.

A rumbling began within me, and I felt the unwanted pangs of hunger. My pajamas clung tighter to my tanned thighs, yet my stomach gave no hindrance to my vain qualms. I placed my hands on the damp glass and pushed myself upwards. The balcony was long with a metal railing and clotheslines that were festooned with now damp garments. The three wooden doors to my left were all closed, with one glowing light in the door at the end of the hall. I turned to my right and crept down the cool marble steps; those white blocks of difficulty that mixed and swirled with the colours of the charcoal family. They seem so inviting in the morning when we are ready to race down the goat path into the sea, but at night when the limbs are fatigued and slow they seemed like the slopes of Mount Athos. As my feet padded down the dampness, I felt the energy harness my limbs propelling me down the uncovered stairs where the sky wanted to christen me with its organic bits of purity. I stood there on the steps, tilting my face up with my tongue protruding from its cave of cynicism.

This marble company of mine led me to a wooden slatted shutter. Reaching my tanned arm, I placed my narrow finger upon the shutter and gently pushed upwards. Guilt did not assuage me since I had been constantly spoiled with bits of bread from my lovely new friend. The surprise surged through me as I felt the window slide open, I had surely believed it would be closed off from the scavenging hands of the hungry. As the sliding came to an end, it revealed the huge window that led to the desires of the carnal. Stale bread and carafes of half drank wine lined the moonlit counter. My greedy fingers grasped the bread, and tore it, bit by bit, into pieces that would fit into the white bone mouth of mine. As my saliva softened the stale pieces, the pleasure coursed through my body, drowning out the sound of the fury behind me. Huddling against the glistening stone, my mouth grinned as the crumbs hit the back of my throat; with the

involuntary reaction of ecstasy forcing me to let out a moan.

This bread was not ordinary manufactured goodness but had been kneaded and loved by my cohorts and me. I climbed back up the stairs and pulled out my journal I had been keeping under my colorful, yet commercial, Thassos towel. I closed my eyes and then opened them and began to write.

Images flooded into my head, racing back to the first time I had become acquainted to those in my workshop. I traipsed down stone stairs leading me away from the El Greco, that familiar place I was now calling home. Excitement gripped my heart as I restrained myself from jogging down the curving asphalt road. Mopeds passed, and I could hear the eclectic language of the Greeks scatter into the wind. I strained my ears for the sounds of a few words hoping I could recognize them but to no avail. As I rounded a bend, I cast my eyes to the left and saw the goat path that I could now balance down with my eyes closed and the El Greco. It's brightly white washed wall with vibrant blue paint that was streaked across it proclaiming this hidden gem's name.

I almost missed the sloping driveway that led to a tiny house with an outdoor oven that swallowed half the yard. A long table under a trellis was already in position along with my new friends. I found my place and looked around. Unripe grapes grappled for space up the sides and on the top of the trellis, creating a rooftop of covering from the unforgiving sun. A woman came out of the home bustling and alive with energy. A stream of foreign words spewed from her mouth as we all tried to understand her. The instructor managed to breach the language barrier, but only to some extent. One could not be sure if this bridge between two dialects it was accurate or not, though I had no reason to doubt. She began to point and nod furiously with glee. Taking a chair she agilely stepped up and began clipping handfuls of grapes from the vines and

placed them on our table. Standing to the side she swayed back and forth with passionate zeal. This is when the cooking began. When the Greek and English culture blended together because of friendship, nature, and dance.

Prisimi (cooking time 2 days)

First one must take a bowl of room temperature water and place organic grapes into them. This is almost impossible as any cultivated area has some sort of pesticide; even Thassos had this issue. However this home, no this trellis, was untainted from the sins of humanity.

Let the grapes soak in the water for roughly two hours so the yeast can accumulate in the bowl from the skin of the fruits. Once the yeast has been harvested, grasp the grapes and remove them from the bowl, discarding them to the side for an alternative use.

Take a canister of flour and scoop three handfuls of this delicacy into the watery yeast mixture. Knead these three items together all the while staying calm with positive energy radiating into this substance. Add dashes of sugar, salt, honey, and anything else so that it can bloom flavor into your dough.

Once the dough has been fully mixed, gently lift it out of the bowl and place it on a floured surface. Begin to knead the dough for roughly ten minutes.

Ball your hand up into a fist and punch the dough. If it rises back up then the dough has been perfectly formed and is ready to begin its process towards edibleness. Shape the dough into a ball, and place it back into the bowl. Take olive oil and coat the dough.

Wrap saran wrap around the ball in order to keep it untainted from the air. Place a towel over the bowl, and let it sit out for the next day. On the second day, go to your dough and you will find that it has risen. This means that the baking is about to begin.

Warm an oven to 450 degrees with a pizza stone laid inside. The pizza stone helps

replicate the brick oven style of baking. Once the oven has acclimated to its temperature carefully remove the plastic wrap from the dough and place it on the oven while lowering the heat to 425. After two minutes have passed, spray the dough with water; this gives it a crunchier crust. After fifteen minutes, place a bowl of water underneath the dough in order to keep the oven moist. Once thirty total minutes have transpired, inspect the bread. There should be a beautiful thick crust that has now developed. If you hit the top of the bread you will hear a hollow noise, this means that the bread is complete.

INGREDIENTS

Yeast

3 cups of flour

sugar

honey

Traditional Pasta and Red Sauce Recipe

In America, there is a fear of cooking in the kitchen. One of the first items we are reluctantly taught is how to boil water and add pasta. This is a staple in homes, and unfortunately this has morphed into a boring task that it has lost its originality and potential for becoming a centerpiece at a gathering. This recipe will teach you how to make simple dough that can be cut into any shape or design that becomes transformed into a filling noodle. Along with this pasta, a simple red sauce is a great accompaniment, but this is only an idea. Anything can accompany these surprisingly easy strips of pasta.

Our workshop resided underneath the canopy of vines in the tavern of the El Greco. The sun beat down in little pools of heat. A carafe of water shimmered and empty lunch plates were pushed to the end of the table. In the corner of the restaurant sat an Italian couple. The man and

woman seemed to be miniature sized, like cut outs from a paper doll book. White hair puffed from the man's head, and a beard assisted in his appearance of being a jolly Santa Clause. The woman sat next to him with her petite clothes and equally white hair. The wind ruffled their tablecloth bringing over the sounds of their romantic language. We all admired their adoration for one another. Though they had been here for a week, we never once saw a look of dismay cross their brows. The sorrow I felt due to my lack of communication made me regret never pursuing a litany of languages.

This class period we would forgo discussing great travel writers, such as Henry Miller, but underwent hands on lesson with food. We pushed our chairs out from the table and turned to walk up three steep cement stairs into the open room where all of the cooking occurs. There was a long wooden table that had been established as our station. Grooves and cracks etched their story of slaughtered fish and lamb. Adjacent to our slaughter block was a table crowded with the hotel's family and staff sitting and taking a break to devour the most recent Soaps.

A pail of flour was laid before us, and before long we were rolling out thin sheets of homemade pasta. Our activities stirred the attention of the customers sitting outside the El Greco. With the Greek music in the background and the fisherman, Stomati, breaking out in song, a bridge between different cultures was forged. No longer did it seem that there was a language barrier because of the unity that is inherent within the two cultures through the ecstasy of music and food.

To my delight, the Italian couple meandered over reinforcing the bridging of languages that had begun. We pantomimed our activities, miming severing the dough into narrow strips. The man grasped the pasta cutter and cleanly sliced the knife to the table, adding another character scar to the table. This is when the cooking began. When the Greek, Italian, and

English culture blended together because of friendship, nature, and dance.

Traditional Pasta and Red Sauce Recipe (cooking time 45 min-1hr)

The most important way to begin a recipe is to start out with positive intention and the joy of the task at hand. If one goes into the food making process with negative energy then that dish is destined for failure with an absence of a pleasurable taste. In order to begin making savory pasta, 2 ½ cups of flour needs to be placed on a clean cooking surface. It will get messy, similar to the way a two year old is with birthday cake, but this should not daunt the hesitant cook because a messy cook is a great cook.

Create a cavern like shape with the flour making steep edges and a shallow center. The type of flour used can be anything, but the 3 eggs that accompany this recipe need to be organic in order to receive the full effect. The natural environment that the chickens are raised in avoids them from being stressed and filled with overt hormones.

Crack these three eggs, and let them slide into the shallow space of the dough that is waiting to be filled by their stringy yellow substance. Then whisk the eggs into a thin soup, and begin kneading the dough into the eggs.

Envelop the eggs and swaddle them like a child; all the while continuing to roll the egg and dough together. Continue kneading until it is evenly distributed, and towards the end of this swaddling add an appropriate amount of water to have an even texture and consistency. So many have fallen off the path early on by finding it necessary to drown their dough, not bringing life but instead watery disaster. After this task has been completed, wrap it in smooth saran wrap and place it to the side for 20 minutes.

The key to this step is making sure that the dough is even in texture and that it is stiff enough so it can be rolled out into thin sheets

The sauce should be given attention too at this point. Begin with two cans of whole tomatoes, or if they are in season take a heap of tomatoes and crush them in your hands while placing them in a pan. Salt is a moot ingredient for this dish as an anchovies or other fishlike creature can be chopped and added to the dish for a heartier flavor. A common connotation has been that anchovies' are repulsive, but this is a response by those who are uneducated in anything beyond microwavable mac n'cheese . The anchovies add a flavor that is headier than salt and provides a minimal amount of protein that is lacking in simple grains of salt.

Place chopped basil and 1 clove of smashed garlic into this pan of ingredients. Most important is the splash of olive oil that needs to be integrated within the sauce, in order to cause a Greek like cohesion. Olive oil is essential to all recipes because it not only provides an extraordinary taste, but it is also abundant with much needed nutrients. Add a few sprigs of parsley, and let this sauce simmer until the feast is ready. Adjacent to this simmering mass, place a pot of water on the stove, add salt, and begin the boiling process.

20 minutes should have expired at this point, therefore it is time to roll out the soon to be pasta. Take a portion of the dough and begin flattening it out. You should be rolling it fairly vigorously creating an unexpected workout. The dough should be thin enough that when you place your hand behind it, a faint shadow will appear. One tool needed is a pasta cutter wheel, and you can make long strips of pasta, ravioli type shapes, or more with it. For the purpose of this recipe, make them into long narrow strips, and place to the side of the table until the cutting has been repeated.

Take handfuls of the beige mass, and place them into the hot rolling water that has slowly been escalating in boil. Once the pasta has been cooked, remove it from the pot and drain. When placing it in the serving dish douse one last time with olive oil, making it glisten. Take the

warm tomato sauce and swaddle the pasta. The key cohesive ingredient is some fresh feta that can easily be sprinkled over this healthy and easy feast.

INGREDIENTS

2 ½ cups of flour

3 eggs

2 cans whole tomatoes

1 anchovies

1 clove garlic

handful basil

greek feta

three sprigs parsley

olive oil

* Bruschetta *

One morning we awoke before the light had crested the mountains. A band of us, almost twenty, were exploring what mysteries Thassos was keeping from us. I donned hiking gear and walked down the now well-worn marble stairs to the tavern. As dawn began to approach I could make out the overhanging trellis that was full of blooming flowers and voluptuous green leaves. Tables were scattered all about with red tablecloths already being placed upon them. As I was sitting, out Tasos strutted with Karolin; his wife. Dedicated owners of their restaurant and hotel they had quickly become our life long friends. Out came a stream of Greek to Christopher, one leader of the trip, and they conversed in broken Greek. Karolin translated easily for us, yet the language barrier was becoming more oppressive by the day. However, this did not stop us from conversing with them through sign language and food. Tasos explained how we had a long trek

ahead; therefore we needed to bring supplies in order to revive our will. We all went back to our rooms and united again with a multitude of knapsacks that were quickly filled with tinfoil wrapped delicacies. Thermos' of Tsipouro were reverently placed in various bags to our sleepy delight.

Our cohort set off down the asphalt road that rounded the bend where the goat path and blue letters bid us farewell. Veering to the right we began to ascend a gently sloped gravel path. Along we traipsed for minutes, no hours. Passing between mountains, fighting gravity that wanted to force us to cascade down the pine needle's slippery tricks. This trap ensnared Karolin, causing Tasos to leap into action. Greek expletives jumped out of his mouth wandering through our ears followed by gentle murmurings of help and good wishes. We proceeded with more caution jumping from slippery moss covered rocks to an embankment. A meager river trickled past our feet, teasing us with cool water now that ours had become stale and warm in our flimsy thermoses. Another gravel trail began to ascend before us. It felt as if we were walking nowhere, almost backwards, with the severity of the steepness, which was presenting itself to us. To our left and right, cement houses dotted the way. Men and women worked outside before the sun rose to its height to avoid being placed in a catatonic state. Greek chattering flitted about like the goats bells that nudged us along in replacing the fear of exile with the consolation that some form of civilizations still existed.

The paths became insistently steeper and treacherous. Blood was running from tired legs and sweat mingled with tears, as it appeared that no end was in sight. When despair had harnessed all our bodies Tasos turned and exclaimed that we were here. The pace of the group began to quicken, and we finally crested the last mountain. The sight that we beheld once again produced a sense of harmolypi amongst us all. Sloping down to a cliff was a multitude of slate

and white colored rocks and marble. Interspersed were scraggly plants that were disintegrating from the sun. We walked towards the edge of the rocky crevice, and out before us was a blue, all different shades of it. To say the sky was blue would be trite. There was a clear icy blue, which I imagine would taste like peppermint. The icy blue was mixed with a baby blue; the kind that would envelop an infant. There was a faint tinge of sapphire blue looming directly above the water. One could almost picture whales surfing and gliding along this expanse of in-between. Along the horizon the blue was faded, like a worn out pair of Levi's. This blue was weary, but it would change once you reached its endpoint. Once you reached the horizon would it be reborn into a peppermint stick of blue? Although these light and dark shades of blue had an airy and temporal feel, on the opposite side of the spectrum were the shades of the water. The sea was dark, like a marble, with slivers of white frosting interspersed. Faint patches of black seemed to dot the onyx like salt water. With the wind pushing the surf in a gypsy dance, it provided a vague swirl of colors that could not be beheld by the eye for longer than a minute.

The stupor that had come upon us was immense, but Tasos shook us out of this reverie. We began to unload our backpacks, and to our delight we discovered we were not having a picnic, but a feast. Out came tablecloths, cups, plates, napkins, and canister after canister of every delicacy imaginable. Olives, bruschetta, tomatoes, cheeses, and meats festooned our plates. Greedy hands passed the nourishments around and eager mouths gobbled it. My hands eagerly sought the bruschetta as I piled mounds of it onto the fresh prisimi. Tasos and Karolin spoke in a dialect familiar to themselves, but we felt no discomfort. The union between languages and delicacies bridged the gap of the unknown. As one mouth ate bruschetta the other swallowed. The stupor of satisfaction hung like a palatable taste in the air as we all found a warm stone to stretch out on and relax our worn bodies. The thought of our daunting trek down

the mountain and up the others had put some to tears.

As we rested our limbs a noise was heard from below. Up the path came a small blue truck that looked as if its wheels would rattle off at any moment. Perplexity came over the group as we wondered why someone would come this far into the middle of nowhere. Tasos greeted the man in Greek – this truck would be our salvation. However, now the problem was posed as to how the seventeen of us would fit in this tiny machine. Arms and legs clambered into the bed of the truck as the descent began.

Hanging onto the back of the truck, leaning over the side, and lying over one another was our only hope of hitching a ride back to our home. Dust settled over our already sweaty bodies, creating another protective coating from the oppressive heat. I balanced on the edge of the truck only daring to glance over the edge when my confidence was at its peak. Besides me was valley after valley of towering trees and jagged rock. One false move or slip of the rubber tires and we would tumble into smithereens. In between scrunching our dry eyes shut and mouthing prayers we all could not stop talking about the feast we had just partaken. At the mention of the dishes our mouths would water over, and the only care that we had left was when we would get to partake in our next feast. This is when the feasting began. When the Greek and English culture blended together because of friendship, nature, and dance.

Bruschetta (cooking time 10 min)

Bruschetta is a fresh and light accompaniment for bread of any sorts, and it is a great addition to casual summer get-togethers. Its name means burned or bread cooked over fire, which already gives it that organic appeal so many of us are lacking. Greece is an ideal place to perfect this recipe because heaps of organic tomatoes are readily available. It is extremely important to use organic tomatoes that have not been tainted by pesticides and other unnatural

products. Picture sitting outside by the Aegean Sea, listening to the throb of the waves next time you partake in this tasty appetizer.

Take six red tomatoes placing them on the cutting board. With a sharp knife, dice the tomatoes, and place a colander over a bowl. As you are dicing the tomatoes, and the cutting board is becoming overflowed with this succulent vegetable, slide them into the colander. Take thick grains of salt and scatter it over the tomatoes, that way the excess juice leaves enabling the bread to remain crisp instead of becoming victim to a soggy mess.

Collect three sprigs of basil and two cloves of garlic and dice them both, preferably on the same cutting board so the herbs begin to get coated by the excess tomato juice. Place them in a bowl that is filled with 1/3 cup of olive oil. Once again the key to this recipe is using high quality olive oil, not the commercialized products that are \$2.99. This enhances the flavor and makes the spread integrate well. Proceed to add the tomatoes into this bowl of basil, garlic, and oil. Slice hearty bread that is toasted, grilled, or left alone. Place a generous amount of bruschetta on top and enjoy!

INGREDIENTS

6 tomatoes

3 sprigs basil

2 cloves garlic

1/3 cup olive oil

Lamb Ragu with Pici

Our eyes had become glazed from the carafe of wine and tsipouro, and we were not quite as surprised as we ordinarily would, when a kitchen staff member tromped out into our group

and threw the raw, freshly slaughtered shoulder of a lamb onto the chopping block. He proceeded to converse with our teacher in Greek and then hacked the meat off the bone. What ensued was a cooking free for all. Not only were Americans interacting with Greeks, but also Italians, Germans, and more conglomerate nationalities. Stomati began to sing along with a Greek radio that made our ears open wider and our mouths curl up into pleasured smiles. These smiles were the smiles of those who had been enticed into this fisherman's watery world.

The onyx salt crushed into the fading white and peeling paint of the boat. The carrier danced further and further away from the receding shore, while eight bodies swayed to the decrepit radio's voice. Stomati swung from the wheel and pulled out a pristine bottle of tsipero, from a hanging dirt encrusted pail. Hands grasped the glass and passed it around with eyes crinkling and sun burnt lips puckering. The burning ripped through my throat and settled in my stomach, which had begun to churn in time to the surf.

The sun drooped low in the sky, casting shimmering diamonds across the salty liquid. Moving shadows caressed our skin as we slowly passed the towering marble cliffs. Bleats hammered against our ears as we continued to languish on the bow. Juicy tomatoes, pre-packaged chips, and red solo cups were passed around with salty hands. Slowly we came to a halt. Stomati's face had lost the casual playfulness that made the lines erase from his sun-weathered face. Instead determination was etched in his eyes as his hands grasped the orange nets and began to unreel them into the black depths. The loud clank of the net machine rang out, forcing the goats on adjacent mountains to stop and gaze at our floating figure. An hour passed by as our fascination was reeled out along with the netting. Speaking Greek and English we melted and became a band of friends embracing the idyllic life that had swept us from reality.

As the empty cartons faded from view, marking the fish entanglements, we were carried

toward the cliffs. The sea pushed and fought the puttering boat from reaching the rocky embankment. One by one our feet pushed off from the slippery bow and we sailed through the air, landing on the white swirled rock. Before us was a circular pool of water surrounded by towering stone. The depths of the clear glass was covered in sea urchins, with their points raising their arms into the air, reaching for the surface. Black and yellow fish floundered about, observing our strange gangly forms. We climbed to the sides of the embankment, and grasping our burnt noses we sailed into the air. The wind rushed over our limbs, creating a cool sensation before the warm water swallowed and digested us. Shouting Greek and English words we floated on our backs. The fish darted down to the shadowy edges, and the sea urchins seemed to be pushing themselves as close to our tender feet as they dared. I put my hands on the side of the rock and pushed my feeble body upwards. The rocks ground into my flesh as my leg wrapped up and over, serving as a point of balance for my uncoordinated form.

The juts and slopes of the cool stone tantalized our fingers and feet, and we found ourselves hopping from ledge to ledge. We were greedy for tunnels and tight places and would shimmy through the darkness while we yearned for the fading sun. As we let the salt crust upon our tanned skin we heard the Greek music whisper to us from the timeless radio. Jumping down the natural stairs, we made our way to that fading boat. The waves had become vicious and it was a struggle against man and nature to reach our temporary landing point. My hair whipped into my watering eye, causing me to lose my breath as I was floating in midair. Stomati expressed gentle impatience, as now was the moment when he impersonated the mighty Poseidon. Placing himself majestically behind the rickety helm, he sped the boat towards the nets, turning it into a mighty vessel of impending doom for the sea creatures. The engine shut off with a start as he dawned his bright rubber suit, which smelled of fish and the freedom that

accompanies one who can harvest the sea. Grasping the floating carton his arms bulged as he places the taught net onto the net machine. The oppressive clanking intermingled with the Greek radio and his chanting for good fortune lulled us into a half sleep.

Slowly the grimy and dripping nets rose from the cavernous depths. The lantern from the awning caused the water to shimmer and the trapped barbounia to glisten. Their pale mouths slapped open and shut, gasping for the water to again overtake their mouths. The flesh colored gills met with the fiery reds that streaked through their meaty body. As the net collapsed onto the damp brown and watery wood their fins contorted into aerobic positions. Slapping themselves to the time of the surf they greedily swam through the open netting only to be stopped by another knotted rope. As the clang of the bell kept signaling a prosperous adventure a translucent glowing orb was whisked out of the water. Pulsating it took its long tentacles and swung itself down like a well-practiced chimpanzee. Pulling itself across the boat it left behind a sticky slime that caused us to recoil in shock. Stomati cried out in glee, as he took his gloved hands and grabbed the rogue squid and tossed it into the full bucket of brackish water. Covering the top with a tarp we hear the futile splashes of the prisoner.

An hour and a half of this show continued as we languidly sat amongst one another watching the fisherman reel in slimy money. The moon cast an iridescent shadow across the dark abyss and we began our chugging back to the store. The smell of fresh fish had overtaken our noses while our clothes were damp from the spray that had peppered our bodies. Thousands of lights faded in and out before us as we made our way back to the third oasis of sand. Again Greek music could be heard resonating from the sandy shore. Stomati began wailing the traditional Greek song as we closed our eyes and felt the hum absorb and infiltrate through our uncultured souls. Fatigue and hunger paralyzed my body and the thought of succulent and tender

fish only made me hungrier for something of greater substance. Leaning over to examine my cohorts timing device that was glued to her wrist, I saw that the time was quickly approaching for the meals to be hotly made and ready to be doled out.

It became an effort of a band of 20 to create this meaty and savory dish after we had just had such an emotional adventure. As the lamb stewed with the sauce we gathered around with one another and were told a multitude of stories that made one question the usefulness of various languages and how it hindered the compatriotism that is waiting to be held. This is when the cooking began. When the Greek and English culture blended together because of friendship, nature, and dance.

Lamb Ragu with Pici (cooking time 2 hrs)

Now don't be daunted by this two-fold recipe! Although it does require time, a 10 year old could accomplish it. It's an extremely simple dish, and since lamb is expensive you can substitute it with alternative meat, such as deer. The appeal of this meal stems from not only making a different type of homemade pasta, but also it serves a multitude so it can be stored for later. It is a perfect winter food, when it is snowing outside and all you desire is a hearty home cooked meal. In Greece the lamb shoulder would be used for this meal, as it is one of the tenderest parts of the lamb. As you are creating this cuisine remember, that you are seasoning and building flavor every step of the way, therefore never get rid of the fond found at the bottom of the pans.

To begin, you need a 2lb lamb shoulder, with the bone in. Sprinkle a hearty salt across the meat, and douse the pan that you will be laying the shoulders in with olive oil. Now leave the lamb alone and let it brown. Intermittently turn them over so that it is producing an even effect.

While the lamb is browning it is time to gather the goodies that will be simmering together. Chop 1 yellow onion, and 2 celery stalks, preferably with the celery root still on. Dice two peeled carrots, and add them to this veggie pile. These ingredients can be found at any grocery store, at any time of year. Be sure to keep your eyes peeled... for when these items go on sale!

After you have chopped these veggies, the lamb will be braised. Find a shallow bowl and place the lamb inside it, and carefully pour the juices from the pan on top of this future meal. Refill the previous pan, where you had cooked the lamb, with the three vegetables that you have prepared. Add oil, toss in two cloves of garlic, along with a bit of salt, and pepper. There are no exact amounts, as I am sure you have noticed, when you are cooking. Cooking is done with the tongue, you should constantly taste your food each step of the way and you will see what is lacking or becoming over-powering.

Additionally pour in a cup of red wine. Wine not only adds flavor, but it deglazes the residual frond that was lying in the bottom of the pan due to its acidic effect. When it reaches a mild boil gently add 1 small can of crushed tomatoes and about half a cup of tomato sauce, and again this is where you can save on cost since you have already splurged on the lamb. It is now time to add the cooling lamb back into the pot. Along with the lamb, place 2 sprigs of fresh rosemary in this melting pot. Cover the lamb creation, and put the heat on the lowest setting.

Two points of consideration. The residual vegetable scraps can be placed in a plastic bag and then placed in the freezer for later use for stock. This stock can be used with chicken soup later on. This is another way to cut on costs. Secondly, as you are checking on the lamb, if you notice that the juice is evaporating add 1 cup water and more tomato sauce

As the lamb is rolling at a low boil, create your pici pasta. Grab a clean bowl and pour a

little less than a cup of cold water, 2 ½ cups of flour, dash of salt, and an appropriate amount of olive oil. And that's it! Super easy, just knead it for 5 min adding a bit of flour so that it is not too sticky and will not grip to the table. Break off miniature hunks of dough with a bit of flour, and roll them by hand into long snakes. Reminiscent of the days in art class where you would make the clay snake? Well it should be because that's essentially what you are doing, only they should be triple the length of those clay snakes. This part will take a long time, so grab some family or friends and have fun. Once the dough has been rolled out into dozens of snakes, put it in a boiling pot of water for 10-12 minutes.

Once two hours have slipped by, while the delicious aromas of the ragu are building, the lamb should have slipped off the bone. Take the meat out of the pan and place it on a clean cutting board. Chop it up, savoring the feel of the knife effortlessly sliding through the tender and fragrant meat. You'll be able to find the bones and fat this way too, so that your guests just have to eat and enjoy.

Replace the chopped lamb back into the pot with some fresh parsley. Add one fourth cup of cream or milk and a dash of cinnamon. The cinnamon adds a hearty flavor that lingers on the tongue after each bite. Let all of these new flavors integrate, and then you are ready to enjoy. Grab some plates, put the fresh pasta on as a base layer, and then place the lamb ragu over top. There is nothing better than a home cooked meal, and even if it does take a bit of time it makes the tongue tingle with anticipation.

INGREDIENTS

2lb lamb shoulder

olive oil

salt & pepper

1 yellow onion
2 carrots
2 celery stalks
2 cloves garlic
1 small can tomatoes
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup tomato sauce
1 cup red wine
fresh rosemary

* **Pizza** *

The festivities had churned into full effect. The tavern had been turned into a destination of Greek music and dance. All the tables were set out with the band set up by the entrance to the kitchen. An electric guitar, keyboard, and microphone were stationed next to their masters. The air was tense with anticipation for the music to begin and to create a life of its own. The first strum and warble of the guitar broke out, and the customers seemed to rise out of their chairs from the bid of the instruments. Greek singing had a life of its own, and so it began. The swirling and mixing of the women's skirts and pants created a dizzy array of color. The guitar hummed, creating an electric current through the air. The embracing of hands and laughter resonated out towards the goat path and down towards the rocky shores where even the urchins could hear. We gathered together in intricate circles learning how to weave in, out, and between one another. The olive tree found in the middle of the tavern was our central idol. A goat's skull was nailed to the rough bark, and the branches spread out adding to the darkness of the evening. Tasos came out with his festive attire and smile that was perpetually on his face. His voice warbled over the notes as he began passing out over a thousand napkins. All at once he began

tossing them into the air and gathered around the females who had the most rhythm and prowess. Napkins rained over our heads as we drunkenly spun round and round.

Another circle was created and Christopher pranced out into the center. He placed a lone shot glass full of tsipero in the middle of our huddle. The cold stone gripped the glass daring the next person to come and tip it over. Out strutted Stomati in his fisherman's wardrobe. Red striped tshirt, with cropped off jeans he still looked as dapper as if he was still twenty-five. He began to pace around the shot glass staying within the confines of our makeshift barrier. The music wailed into the night when he started doing the traditional drunk dance. Swaying to and fro he would leap over the glass, coming inches from tipping it over. The wind swept the napkins up in a flurry scattering them around like snow. On his last leap there were bated breaths all around until he gracefully came to a stop on the other side. The applause rang out as he bowed and swiftly swallowed his shot of tsipero.

Sweat dripped from our brow and forced our cotton shirts to stick against our salty skin. My stomach rumbled as I smelled the lamb and octopus being grilled on the sooty ledge outside. Christopher began his impromptu lesson on how the perfect pizza is created. From one of the tables under the awnings he grabs a bowl of prisimi and launches into another eloquent lesson of culinary rhetoric. The patrons of the dinner eagerly came over to see what the fuss was about. This is when the cooking began. When the Greek and English culture blended together because of friendship, nature, and dance.

Pizza (cooking time 1 hr)

First you begin with your prisimi, or dough. You carefully knead it in order to spring back to life. Following this you need two teaspoons of store bought yeast. Take your teaspoon and place it into the jar forming two level scoops. Put these measurements into your bowl of

dough. Along with this take a tablespoon of sugar and add it. This gives it a sweeter flavor and adds character to the prisimi.

Following these two dry ingredients add two cups of warm water. The warm water is important because it causes the dough to be suppler within the confines of your hands once you begin kneading it. Also place in your large bowl one-third cup of hearty olive oil and five cups of pristine flour. Now the strenuous work begins that will certainly strengthen your arms. Begin kneading all of the ingredients together, pulling apart the prisimi into sections and integrating them once again. This will take at least fifteen minutes in order to be assured that it is fully mixed and the dough is the correct consistency. It should be smooth and when you punch it, rise back up.

Now you are going to take a two hand sized portion of the dough. Put it on a smooth table that has been floured by cornmeal to ensure it will not stick and to give the dough an interesting texture. Start rolling the dough out with a rolling pin or pressing it down with your hands. This should be a fun and active time in the kitchen so make sure you're enjoying yourself, and imagine savoring your finished product. Remember the red sauce you made for the traditional pasta? Well this would be the perfect time to grab some of that if you have refrigerated or frozen it. If not, no fear you can make it in a jiffy. It does not seem to make sense to use the store bought pizza sauce for dough that is so pure and untainted.

Place your dough into a circle on a pizza stone. The thickness of the dough should be about two and a half inches. It is really up to you, but that gives it a nice and airy crust. Take your sauce and slather it all over the pizza leaving a half-inch rim for your crust. Then the real decorations begin. You can use whatever toppings you like. I prefer fresh tomatoes, mozzarella, and some sprigs of basil. Take your pizza stone and place it in your indoor or outdoor oven. Set

the temperature for about 425 and leave in for fifteen minutes and then check on it. The savory treats should be bubbling and the crust should have a nice brown hue to it. Once it is to your satisfaction remove the pizza stone from the oven, cool the concoction and enjoy!

INGREDIENTS

Prisimi

2 teaspoons yeast

1 tablespoon sugar

2 cups warm water

1/3 cup olive oil

5 cups flour

Thassos taught me a multitude of lifelong lessons. Not necessarily how to cook, but more importantly how to live. I was able to witness a bridging between different languages. This barrier was broken not just through the culinary prowess that we all ended up displaying, but it also was crossed by entertainment: music, dance, and nature. It all contributes to connecting everyone on the planet. These recipes are not only meant to fill the body, but also to educate those of us who are being newly exposed to the world of culinary arts. There are so many by-products that we consume on a daily basis that we have forgotten the heart of nature and how it so generously produces vegetation for our nourishment. Take time out of your day to cook, sing, dance, or just explore your local area. There is no need to traverse great lengths to find natural beauty and those of different origins than you. Embrace what is around you, and savor the simpler things.