

NEW BOOK AND DIGITAL ARCHIVE OFFER GLIMPSES INTO COOP'S 50-YEAR HISTORY

August 26, 2025



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By Leila Darabi

Park Slope Food Coop members, staff and curious Brooklynites gathered for an evening of eclectic history this June at the Center for Brooklyn History, exploring the rich and sometimes contentious history of the Coop. The event marked the debut of a newly digitized archive of the *Linewaiters' Gazette* and the launch of a new book, *Park Slope Food Coop: 50 Years of Cooperation*, written by Coop member Sun Yu. *New Yorker* staff writer and Coop member Alexandra Schwartz moderated a conversation between Yu and Coop co-founder Joe Holtz, all of which was recorded and is now viewable on the Center's YouTube channel.



Alexandra Schwartz, Joe Holtz and Sun Yu. Photograph by Rod Morrison.

Marcia Ely, Director of Programs at the Center, opened the event by announcing the archive's public launch. She called past issues of the *Gazette* "a mirror, not only to the Coop's 50-year history, but to Brooklyn's history and to our national story."

Despite dominating recent Coop General Meetings and the *Gazette* letters section, the words "Israel," "Palestine," "Gaza" and "boycott" did not come up once during discussions of historical disputes at the Coop.

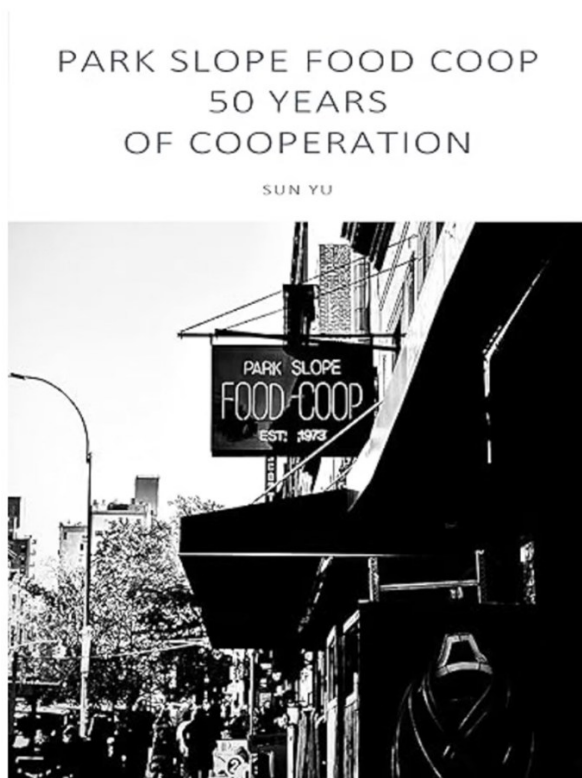
LETTERS BRING TO LIFE PAST CONTROVERSIES

"I just thought this was the most amazing, incredible organization that I had ever seen," Yu said when asked what inspired him to write his book. "The story deserved to be told," he added.

Sourced exclusively from past issues of the *Gazette*, Yu's book offers a lively recounting of the Coop's founding, early challenges, enduring debates and distinctive charm. He especially enjoyed reading the impassioned letters to the editors submitted by members over the years.

Yu began the project during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when sifting through old issues became a kind of meditative routine. Friends in his native South Korea, stunned by his descriptions of a member-run supermarket in Brooklyn, encouraged him to write the book.

Park Slope Food Coop: 50 Years of Cooperation is now available for purchase at the Coop for \$9.



Sun Yu's book. Photograph by Caroline Mardok.

A STORY OF COEXISTENCE

In her widely read 2019 *New Yorker* article, “The Grocery Store Where Produce Meets Politics,” Schwartz captured the Coop’s singular blend of earnestness and discord.

Speaking to the *Gazette* following the book event, she noted:

I think what you see in the book—and this is the Coop story—is, first of all, people trying and failing and trying again to live together. The Coop is a huge success story about coexistence, and for that reason it is also about endless quarrels and squabbles, because that’s really what coexistence is. And you see people’s passion, which is both moving and enraging.

“I LOOK AROUND TODAY AND I SEE YOUNG PEOPLE, SO I FEEL LIKE WE’RE STILL ALIVE,” SAYS COOP CO-FOUNDER JOE HOLZ.

WORK MAKES IT WORK

Holtz, in addition to cofounding the Coop in 1973, became its first paid employee in 1975. He and the other founders were in their twenties when they launched this grand experiment in cooperative retail.

At one point during his decades of leadership, Holtz even organized a study group for staff, inviting them to analyze what caused other similar cooperatives to fail. One case study stuck with him: “They didn’t do a good job of bringing in younger people, and it just went away [when the founders retired],” he told the audience. “I look around today and I see young people, so I feel like we’re still alive.”

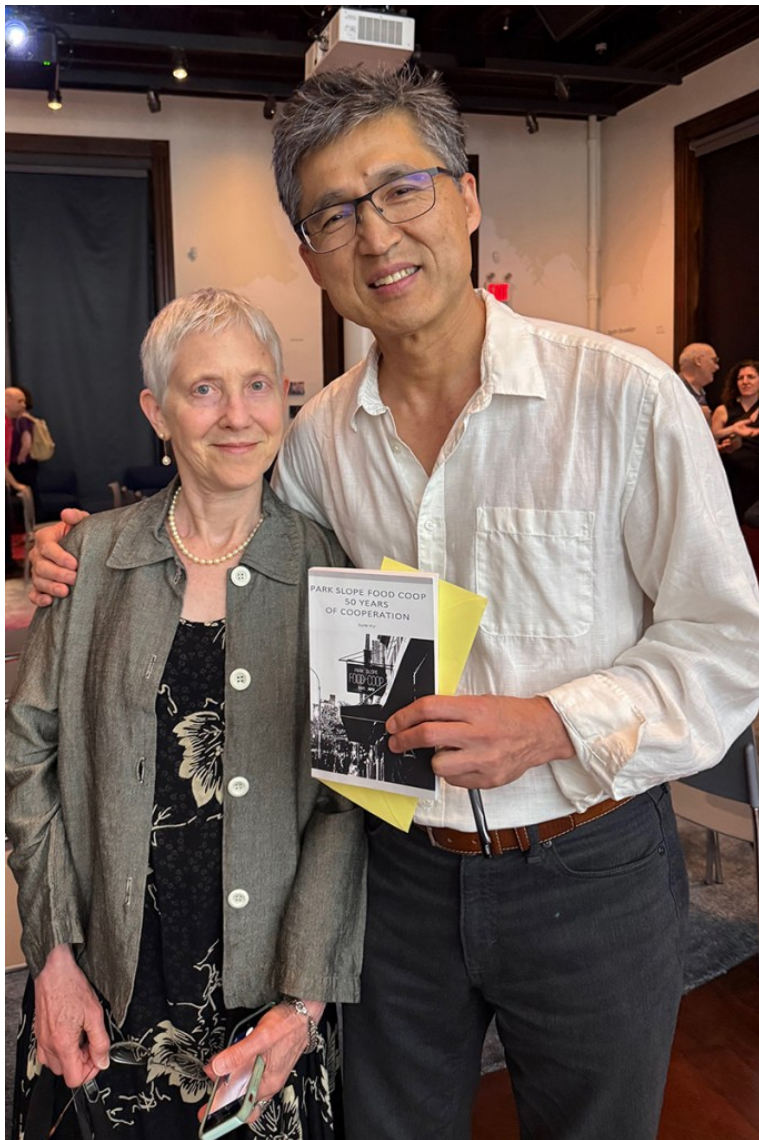
Holtz remains steadfast in his belief that the Coop’s work requirement is central to its success—and its fairness. “If you don’t make everybody work and start letting some people buy their way out of work, that sets up a class system,” he said.



Sun Yu, Joe Holtz and Alexandra Schwartz at the Center for Brooklyn History. Photographs by Rod Morrison.



Sun Yu, Joe Holtz and Alexandra Schwartz at the Center for Brooklyn History. Photographs by Rod Morrison.



Sun Yu, sharing his book after the talk with *Linewaiters' Gazette* artist and archivist, Deborah Tint. Photograph by Rod Morrison.

A CHEESE COUNTER DISAPPEARS

Yu recalled being amazed when a friend first brought him to the Coop in 2007. "I saw that it worked. That was the moment. I saw everyone working, stocking vegetables and fruit. And I just immediately wanted to be part of it," he said.

One detail from early years at the Coop that stuck with him was the old cheese counter. "It was this community touchpoint," he said. "You'd tell another member what you wanted, and they'd weigh it and have it ready by checkout."

THE DIGITIZED *LINEWAITERS' GAZETTE* ARCHIVE IS NOW ACCESSIBLE THROUGH THE CENTER'S DIGITAL COLLECTIONS PORTAL.

Holtz reminisced about the cheese counter as well: "There was a sense of connection, like the person behind the counter cared." Cheese slicing eventually moved to the basement when the Coop expanded because, as Holtz explained, the counter took up a lot of space and "every square foot mattered."

THE GAZETTE ARCHIVE GOES DIGITAL

The digitized *Linewaiters' Gazette* archive is now accessible through the Center's digital collections portal, where readers can access PDFs of past *Gazette* issues. Archivist Alice Griffin and Reference Librarian Liza Katz began digitizing the collection in 2013, and Deborah Tint, the Center's Special Collections Cataloger and a longtime *Gazette* illustrator, later joined the work. A grant from the Metropolitan New York Library Council funded the last mile of the project.

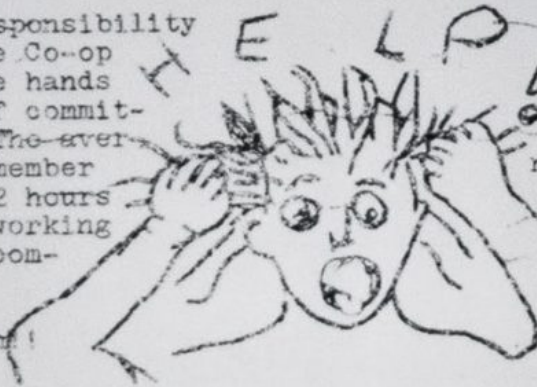
THE LINEWAITER'S GAZETTE

Official Newsletter of Park Slope Food Co-op/Bklyn, NY, Oct. 27, 1973

Dear Folks,

This may be the last "Line Waiter's Gazette" you will read. If there is continued lack of active participation on all levels and continued financial losses, the Park Slope Food Co-op Store will be forced to close. The outcome will be decided at the General Meeting on Tuesday, October 30, 1973 at 7:30 PM.

The main responsibility for running the Co-op is still in the hands of a handful of committee members. The average committee member puts in 5 to 12 hours per week (!!) working for the Co-op compared to most people's 3 hours per month! These people are tired and overworked and the time period for which they have volunteered is over on October 30th. If other



If enough people volunteer there will be no need for people to put in excessive time and energy as is happening now.

The continued existence and efficient functioning of the Co-op can only be realized if there are VERY LARGE committees.

In this way, it will not be, as it is now, dependent on a few individuals expending abnormal amounts of energy. The future of the Co-op

Sample of the old *Linewaiters' Gazette*.

THE LINE WAITERS' GAZETTE

SEPT. 22 1973

In case you haven't noticed, the line at the coop is longer than ever. Everyone shows up early to get their share of the limited amount of food. If there was enough food, people could show up all throughout the day, not wait and still get food. There isn't enough food because there isn't enough money to buy what we need. In fact the coop is still losing money. Fund raising, loans, etc. have been suggested as possible solutions. A plan of action will be discussed at the next general meeting - so please think about this and come, TUESDAY SEPT. 25, 7:30 at the Mongoose.

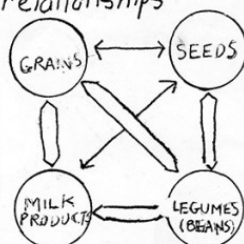
Don't forget to sign up for work requirement

CATS ~~1~~ ~~2~~ ARE UP FOR ADOPTION - SPEAK TO COORDINATOR

NEWSLETTER IDEAS? CONTACT JINI 638-7396 KATHY 788-1808

BALANCING PROTEINS WITHOUT MEAT

In order to get the full benefit of the proteins in your food, you need to eat foods which together supply you with all the essential amino acids. Proteins in one food, complement the proteins in another. This is especially important for those of us who eat little or no meat. The chart below shows complementary protein relationships



□ means groups are generally complementary

↔ means only some items in each group are complementary

For more information read DIET FOR A SMALL PLANET by Frances Moore LAPPÉ

Sample of the old *Linewaiters' Gazette*.

As of August 2025, issues from 1973 through 1987 are available online, with additional batches covering 1988 to 2006 expected this fall. The Coop's website also hosts past issues of the *Gazette*, through August 2021. That August the newsletter went fully digital at *LinewaitersGazette.com*. Both collections include some gaps. For example, no issues could be located from 1974 or 1980, and some issues from 1973 and 1975 are missing.

Tint and her colleagues are working with Coop staff to track down members who might have held on to missing editions (and have asked that anyone with physical copies from the missing years contact the *Gazette*). Holtz recalled the occasional surprise discovery while working with the archive team: "I would see another issue from [a missing] year just on my desk, brought by someone anonymously," he said. "It was

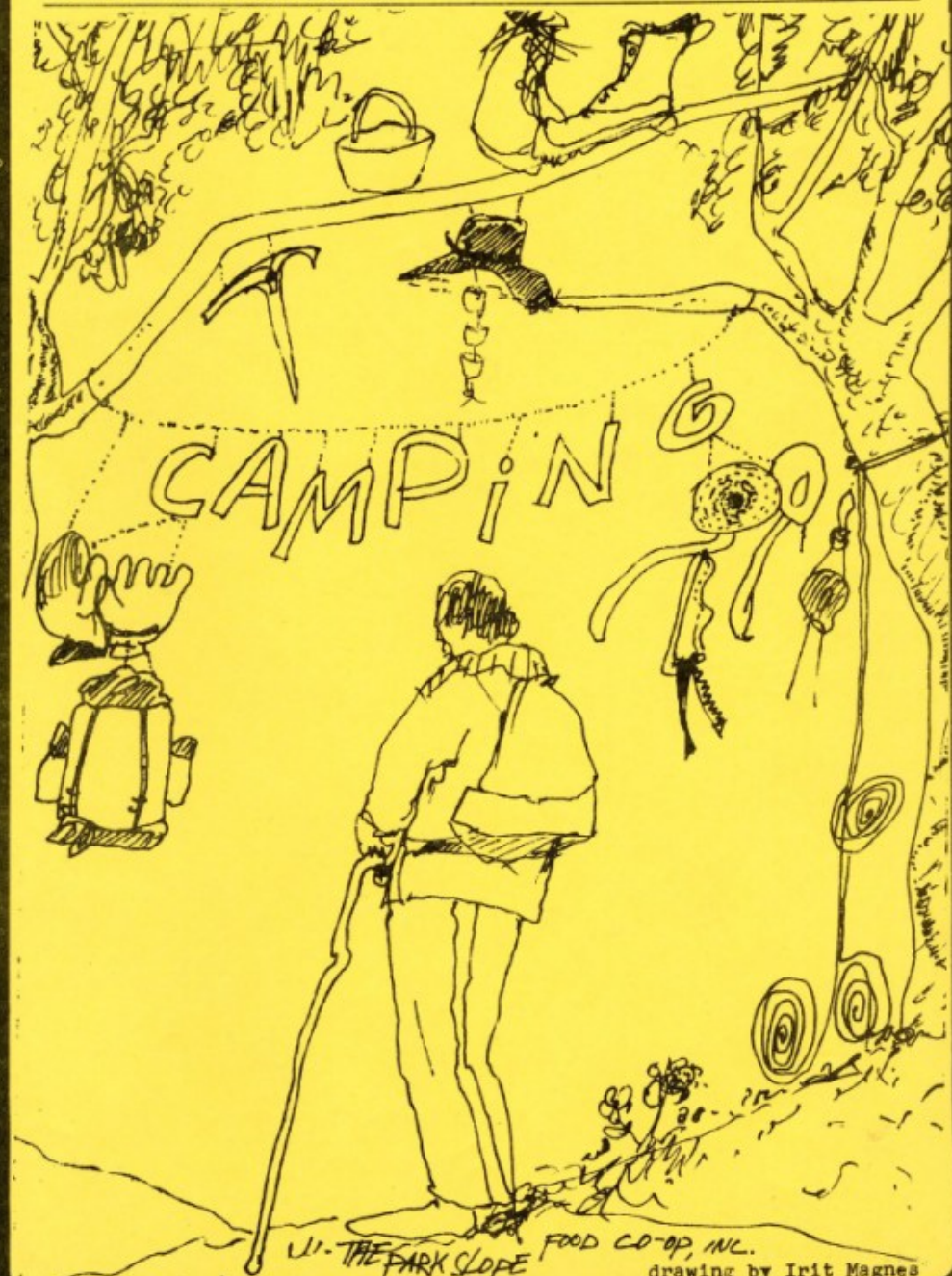
great.”

Linewaiters Gazette



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER
OF THE PARK SLOPE FOOD CO-OP, INC.

June 15, 1978



L.I. - THE PARK SLOPE FOOD CO-OP, INC.
drawing by Irit Magnes

Gazette from 1978.

Linewaiters Gazette



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER
OF THE PARK SLOPE FOOD CO-OP, INC.

March 8, 1979



Gazette from 1979.

ILLUSTRATING HISTORY

In a blog post for the Center, Tint wrote that poring over early issues offered a glimpse into the Coop's "pragmatic idealism" and revealed how "process and policy were developed on the fly" in the store's early days. In a call with the *Gazette*, she shared that one of the highlights of the endeavor had been rediscovering the expressive cartoons of *Gazette* illustrator Rod Morrison.

As part of the archive's public debut, Tint's own illustrations were on display the evening of the event.

THE COOP'S STORY LIVES ON

In his retirement letter to members earlier this year, Holtz summed up what kept him going for five decades:

I have stayed because of the overwhelmingly positive energy and thoughts so many of our members have about the Coop; I have stayed because of how much our members care for the Coop and feel connected to their Coop.

As Yu noted, the Coop's history isn't just worth preserving, it's worth participating in. "That's the thing that amazed me from the start," he said. "It's a supermarket. But it's also a story."

Leila Darabi joined the Gazette as a reporter in 2016. She posts photos of the food she makes with Coop ingredients on Instagram (@persian_ish). On September 24th, she will lead the next Coop cooking class, featuring techniques and recipes for cooking a seasonal favorite: eggplant.