@FOODCOOP ON INSTAGRAM CONNECTS MEMBERS THROUGH THEIR COOKING

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Photos by Caroline Mardok

By Leila Darabi

In the new Netflix series, *Inventing Anna,* a reporter assisted by several colleagues uses Instagram to piece together the social network and international movement of her subject, Anna Soroken (a.k.a., Anna Delvey). This fake heiress scammed acquaintances into paying her lavish hotel bills and to vouch for her as she applied for a $40 million loan. In dramatized scenes, the reporters print out selfies, scouring the background for location clues and potential people to interview as they piece together Anna's world travel and luxury hotel hopping.

A deep dive into the Coop's Instagram feed tells a far more wholesome but no less intricate story. At the time of writing, @foodcoop on Instagram had more than 14,200 followers. Scrolling back through the 6,383 posts and the more than 100 highlights folders of past posts shared as stories, one can track shifts in the Coop's community of members.

PRE-PANDEMIC BLISS

Several years before the pandemic reached Brooklyn, the Coop's Instagram largely featured newly stocked produce and the occasional store announcement. Peppered between those posts, @foodcoop regularly reposted photos members shared of the foods they were cooking at home, showcasing the people behind the cooperative.

These posts of members' cooking showcased diverse palates and a mix of professional and amateur creations. There were personal chef Jeffrey Mason (@chefjeffreynyc)'s homemade granola bars; Megan Davidson (@brooklyndoula)'s test run of three new bundt pans; chef and teaching instructor Michelle Doll (@chefmichelledoll)'s declaration of "watermelon radishes for life"; and tuba player Matthew Cain (@matthew_cain)'s savory tart.

Looking back now at Deb Etsten (@citychiclet)'s Meyer lemon and rosemary focaccia, posted just before the pandemic lockdown started in New York, the @foodcoop feed recalls a simpler time before trips to the Coop and sourcing of yeast, flour and specialty items required more complex planning.



Shortcut spring risotto

INCREASED ENGAGEMENT

After March of 2020, the Coop's Instagram posts garnered more comments. For example, Dough Ashford (@deashford)'s post celebrating his last Coop shift pre-retirement received 273 likes and only one comment on February 25, 2020. Whereas a typical post on April 7, 2020, which featured a selfie of Autumn L. (@autumng0tstamina) in line to get into the Coop, received 61 comments as members pooled intel on line lengths ("Ok in line at 2:45. Abt five down from 7th ave on President. Will update when I get to door."); safety regulations ("anyone knows if my toddler needs to wear a mask? She will probably not keep it on…"); and messages of gratitude ("thank you food coop workers!!!").

The same period saw a shift in members' whereabouts. While Instagram continued to provide a space to peer into one another's kitchens, several of the home cooks most

reposted by @foodcoop left the city. The anonymous chef behind @clintonhilltestkitchen put their membership on pause. Nutritionist Sydney Greene (@greenehealth) moved to Colorado. Food blogger Smita (@hakunasmitata) left Brooklyn. And Kaori Goto and her family moved to her home country of Japan (@kaori_brooklyn).

Kaori and Smita share that they both miss the Coop and enjoy the vicarious glimpse into produce and organic offerings they get by staying connected through Instagram. Both were generous enough to share spring recipes, and we included one further down in this article.

TIPS FOR HOME FOOD PHOTOGRAPHERS

The account's contents are currently monitored, shared and maintained by a lone Coop member. Other Coop staff have limited involvement.

> "SHOOTING IN NATURAL LIGHT IS A MUST FOR ME—I'M SOMEONE WITHOUT A LOT OF FANCY LIGHTING EQUIPMENT."
>
> *FOOD WRITER CATHEY ERWAY*

When contacted for comment (via Instagram direct message), the staff member who manages the Coop's Instagram account seemed to prefer remaining anonymous.

The Coop's Instagram manager did, however, offer tips for members posting photos of what they make with Coop-sourced ingredients:

- **Tag @foodcoop.** We love to share your grocery cart, your refrigerator contents, your shift, and occasionally your dinner.

- **Avoid kids.** We don't want to share other people's children, no matter how

cute they are, unless the guardian has agreed (we try not to share any pix taken without the subject's explicit consent.)

- **No self promotion.** Sometimes people try to publicize themselves through the Coop, like their fitness or nutrition business, or a cause the Coop is not explicitly signed up for. We can't do that. There's no way to do it equitably for all members, so we avoid this sort of repost altogether—unless it's directly related to the store or a co-operative endeavor that we're officially connected to, e.g., a food drive or another Coop we're helping out. Otherwise, we're not reposting it.

- **Set to public.** Your post has to be set to public for us to share it. We've had people tag us and not realize their account and posts are private, and so unshareable. So, tag us if it's a Coop thing, and make sure your post is shareable!

- **Focus.** We usually don't re-gram blurry pictures, and we tend to re- gram fewer videos than still pictures, and almost no boomerangs.

When reached by email for additional guidance, cookbook author and food writer Cathey Erway (@cathyerway) offered this advice:

"Shooting in natural light is a must for me—I'm someone without a lot of fancy lighting equipment. I like shooting backlit images of food, preferably in the morning when the sun is lighter."





Kaori's Chirashi-zushi

TWO SPRING RECIPES

Recipe 1: Shortcut Spring Risotto (full recipe)

Recipe 2: Kaori's Chirashi-zushi (full recipe printed below)

3 – 4 servings

This is a popular rice dish for Hinamatsuri or Girls' Day Celebration (March 3) in Japan. It's also commonly made for gatherings and picnics and eaten throughout the year.

Ingredients:

Sushi Rice

- 1.5 cups sushi rice (uncooked)
- 3 – 4 Tbs sushi vinegar (5 Tbs vinegar, 2 Tbs sugar, 2 tsp salt)
- (Optional) 2 – 4 tsp roasted white sesame seeds

Vegetables to mix in the rice:

- 3/4 cup shiitake mushrooms, thinly sliced
- 3/4 cup chopped carrot
- 3/4 cup chopped burdock root
- 2.5 Tbs soy sauce
- 2 Tbs sugar
- 1 Tbs Mirin or sake
- 1/4 cup water

Toppings:

- 1 cup snow peas, loosely packed
- (optional) 2 eggs + a pinch of salt
- 1 sheet of nori, cut thinly with scissors or ripped in small pieces

Steps

1) Cook the vegetables with the seasonings and water until soft and flavorful. Let cool, drain the excess seasoning broth, and set aside.

2) Cook the sushi rice. (If you are cooking rice in a pot, soak the grains for 30 minutes or more and drain once. Cook with exactly the same volume of water, e.g., 1 cup of rice + 1 cup of water, at medium low heat with the lid on. Once it starts boiling, turn the heat to low, let it cook for another 2-3 minutes, turn it off and let the residual heat cook the rice thoroughly for 10-15 minutes.)

3) Blanch the snow peas in lightly salted water and cut them thinly.

4) Beat the eggs with a pinch of salt and make a few thin egg “crepes.” Slice them thinly like spaghetti.

(If you roll up the “crepes” together, it’s easy to slice them.)

5) Sprinkle the sushi vinegar on the warm cooked rice and sesame seeds. Mix thoroughly but lightly. Once well mixed, mix in the cooked vegetables.

6) Spread the snow peas and eggs on top of the rice, and it’s done! Sprinkle the nori on top right before serving.

Other topping ideas: Shelled edamame, lightly salted cooked salmon pieces, sliced avocado, mayonnaise (Japanese-kind recommended) or anything else you can think of!

Enjoy!