

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA



Sisig



Anthony Bourdain in 2016.



Pork noodle bowl

Buoy Beer serves up a tribute to Bourdain

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The brutal, romantic, blood-soaked benedictions of Anthony Bourdain touched millions. Seemingly on top of the world, Bourdain's suicide left fans reeling, confused and heartbroken.

Among the mourners: head chef at Buoy Beer, Erick Jenkins, who first related viscerally to Bourdain's seminal "Kitchen Confidential," wherein Bourdain laid bare the raw, unflinching underbelly of kitchen work.

Bourdain "identified with the grunts," wrote New York Times restaurant critic Pete Wells, "portraying himself as a slinger of cheap steaks and French fries. The grunts, in turn, identified with him, not because of his contributions as a chef — who can name an Anthony Bourdain dish? — but because he told the world what the work was really like."

Jenkins, then, is one of those grunts — the unsung whose work Bourdain ennobled.

As a tribute — and perhaps, too, as an outlet for his grief — Jenkins designed a handful of specials.

Over the last week in June he would cook and share some of Bourdain's favorite dishes.

By donating the proceeds from the specials to Seaside High School's Culinary Arts Program, Jenkins told the Daily Astorian he hoped to "make something good come out of something so tragic."

The handful of dishes Jenkins proffered were emblematic of Bourdain's tattered passport, very much in harmony with his globe-trotting cultural appetite. But even after being afforded money and access, Bourdain's compass remained glued to his North Star: the dignity of the working-class, street-level culture.

As Wells wrote in a comprehensive remembrance, "once (Bourdain) left kitchens behind for a career in travel television, he didn't lead his camera crews on a tour of the world's most luxurious resorts. He went to Detroit and the Bronx, Libya and Beirut."

And of those cuisines Jenkins chose to highlight, few are regularly available on the North Coast. That made them doubly special. Real treats. Two of them — sisig and tonkatsu — I would be trying for the first time.

Sisig comes from the Philip-

pin. It's dead simple: just rice, garlic, egg and pork — and incredibly satisfying.

Sisig began as a vehicle for using parts of the pig — the freaky parts Bourdain so relished, including the face, ears, snout and cheeks — that would otherwise be discarded. Jenkins' version was punched up, made more broadly palatable with luscious pork belly. (Many of the specials revolved around pork, which Bourdain called his "favorite vegetable.")

An evangelist for many things (from food to art to politics, philosophy, jiu jitsu and so on), Bourdain was characteristically bullish on the Filipino dish.

"I think sisig is perfectly positioned to win the hearts and minds of the world as a whole," Bourdain said, adding that it's "casual, accessible," and "exactly what you need after a few beers."

Consider me a convert. I could eat sisig a few times a week, especially after surfing.

The tonkatsu was comfy, too — a breaded and fried pork cutlet that, for pig, is relatively lean. But it's the wicked crunch that makes it. Tonkatsu really snaps.

Then there were Steak Frites (of French provenance) and Cacio e

Pepe (Italian).

Although breakfast was his comfort zone, when Bourdain was a chef, steak frites was the kind of thing he prepared regularly. His advice on cooking a good steak is simple: "Don't f---ing touch it," Bourdain barked. Rather, remove the meat from the grill and let it sit, unmolested, for five-to-seven minutes. Resist the urge to cut or poke it.

"What's going on inside is, (the steak) is continuing to cook," Bourdain explained in a tutorial. "But even more importantly, the juices are distributing themselves in a truly wonderful alignment."

"All the difference in the world between a good steak and a totally messed up steak is going on in that period of time where you're just doing nothing. Nothing."

Then there was the Cacio e Pepe, which in Italian means "cheese and pepper." And it's really that basic: noodles, cheeses, black pepper and olive oil.

Cacio e Pepe, Bourdain said, "could be the greatest thing in the history of the world." On location in Rome, Bourdain refused to name the restaurant that made his favorite, hoping to save it from being overrun by tourists. (Fans of

the show eventually unmasked it, however.)

The parade of pork specials resumed with a noodle bowl that included crispy, oily skin and more supple cubes. I couldn't help but think it was a nod to Bourdain's meal in Hanoi with then-president Barack Obama. Once again, rather than fancy digs, the iconoclast TV host brought the POTUS to a bare-bones, hole-in-the-wall noodle shop. Bourdain picked up the \$6 tab.

Indeed, like everything Bourdain did, the gesture began with food but encompassed so much more.

"If I'm an advocate for anything, it's to move," Bourdain said. "As far as you can, as much as you can. Across the ocean, or simply across the river. The extent to which you can walk in someone else's shoes or at least eat their food, it's a plus for everybody."

In sharing Bourdain's favorites, chef Jenkins showed a facility with these polyglot flavors. Here's hoping he continues to explore, to move.

The same goes for the rest of us. In food is everything.

So, Anthony, a pint — or six — of Buoy's Czech Pils to you. May your inspirations echo on. **CW**