



“Doc” Willoughby in his home kitchen in Cambridge, a laboratory for cookbooks

to,” with instructions for what to do with it in the recipe itself? As long as they addressed all these questions, they learned, these choices were mostly up to them.

That book, *The Thrill of the Grill* (1990), has sold well over 100,000 copies; eight books later, Willoughby believes *Thrill* is still the team’s top seller. “I think the level of detail and specificity” Guarnaschelli insisted on, he says, “was part of what helped the book expand its audience beyond people who were already dedicated grillers.”

Willoughby, whose career now embraces nearly 23 years as a food writer, doesn’t restrict

himself to cookbooks. Before *Thrill* came out, Guarnaschelli advised the former English concentrator to write magazine articles to increase his name recognition. His very first piece, on barbecue, for *Cook’s Illustrated*, impressed the magazine’s founder and publisher, Christopher Kimball, enough to prompt the offer of a writing job—and Willoughby finally quit his day job with legal services.

Since then he’s been the executive editor of the late *Gourmet* magazine and a columnist for the Dining section of *The New York Times*, where he remains a regular contributor. He’s now the executive editor of magazines at America’s Test Kitchen, another Kimball enterprise, based in Brookline, Massachusetts. It’s mostly in his “spare time” that he’s written, ghostwritten, co-written, developed, tested,

and/or edited 17 cookbooks, including the nine he’s done with Schlesinger, which include *Salsas, Sambals, Chutneys, and Chowchows* (1993), *Big Flavors of the Hot Sun: Recipes and Techniques from the Spice Zone* (1994), *License to Grill* (1997) and *Let the Flames Begin: Tips,*



Visit harvardmag.com/extras to watch Willoughby prepare a Thai-inspired sauce for grilled pork.

The Art of the Cookbook

“Doc” Willoughby talks grilling and writing.

JOHAN “DOC” WILLOUGHBY ’70 got an unconventional start as a cookbook author. First, he was feeling burned out at a legal-services job. Next, in the mid 1980s he met, became friends with, and started volunteering a few nights a week as a line cook and cold-station guy for Chris Schlesinger, former chef/owner of Cambridge’s renowned East Coast Grill. Willoughby had no professional cooking experience and so, with the promise of a vacation if the East Coast Grill succeeded, he worked for a year for free. (One year later he enjoyed his all-expense-paid trip to Mexico.) In 1989, when a literary agent approached Schlesinger about doing a cookbook, he persuaded her to let the inexperienced Willoughby try writing the proposal—probably, Willoughby says, “because we share the same way of looking at food, he wanted it to be more informal than a regular cookbook, and it was just a nice thing to do.”

The beginning authors were lucky to have the help of Schlesinger’s kitchen

staff, who tested recipes, and of noted cookbook editor Maria Guarnaschelli, who in the course of two long days, taught the novices how to turn their ragtag collection of recipes and text into a coherent, useful book. “Chris assumed that readers would know nearly as much about grilling as he did,” Willoughby remembers, “since it’s such a straightforward cooking method. Maria convinced us that people needed to know everything, from how to light the fire to how to tell when the fire was the right temperature to what kind of tools they should have if they wanted to become grillers.”

The men also had to decide how much instruction to offer, and where. For example, does the ingredients list say “one lime” or “two tablespoons of lime juice”? “We said both,” Willoughby recalls: ‘two tablespoons of lime juice from one lime,’ so you knew how much you needed to buy at the grocery store.” Is it “one tomato, charred, peeled, seeded, and chopped” or simply “one toma-

Techniques, and Recipes for Real Live Fire Cooking (2002). The pair are currently working on a tenth book, still untitled, which they jokingly refer to as “Shut Up and Grill It,” a nod to how complicated food has become since they started their collaboration.

To them, food *isn't* complicated. It's a good time. “In fact,” Willoughby comments, “one of the main reasons we have kept doing cookbooks together over the years is that it gives us an excuse to hang out, drinking beer and cooking, and it's also a good reason to travel.”

Those travels, mostly to hot-weather regions of the world, inspire them. Once they have an idea for a new book, Schlesinger (mostly) writes the recipes, drawing on a combination of his exposure to international food cultures, decades of professional experience, and lifelong love of food. (Willoughby says his friend has a particular talent for coming up with precisely the right amounts of ingredients—this much balsamic, that much oil—without measuring, and “He's almost always right.”) Schlesinger then tests all his recipes himself, while Willoughby makes many of

Chapter & Verse

Correspondence on not-so-famous lost words

Michael Comenetz asks where Mark Twain said, approximately, “I don't know why so much is made of the thoughts of great men. I have had many of the same thoughts, they just had them before me.”

Andrew Schmookler hopes someone can identify a fable he read some 35 years ago. It depicted iron filings making what they thought was their own decision about where to go, when they were in fact being moved by the force of a magnet.

“Lecturers talk while other people sleep” (January-February). Fred Shapiro, editor of *The Yale Book of Quotations*, writes, “I was unable to find any source details beyond Alfred Capus's name in the Google results, nor any citations in French quotation dictionaries. Most Web attributions actually credit W. H. Auden

rather than Camus or Capus, but there is no reason to believe he is the real coiner. In searching English-language newspaper databases, I find that the *Boston Globe*, on September 24, 1925, has “Do you talk in your sleep?...I talk in other people's sleep....I'm a college professor!” A similar anecdote in the *Detroit Free Press* of October 22, 1906, has the punch line, “He talks in other people's sleep. He is a preacher.”

“unornamental men” (January-February). John Gordon identified this excerpt from Morris Bishop's poem “A View of the Gulf,” published in the July 18, 1964, issue of *Saturday Review* (xlvi:29; 6).

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those that seem trickiest. They also hire a recipe tester “just to be safe.” Testers have usually worked at restaurants or food magazines, but sometimes are simply people Schlesinger has met who express an interest in the job. The latter “might be the best,” Willoughby admits, because they

more closely replicate the experience of the home cook.

Mostly, their books have been all about live fire. Why have they focused mainly on grilling? Because, says Willoughby, “it’s more fun.” He and Schlesinger *have* written a few non-grilling books; the best

known is *How to Cook Meat*. “For that one,” Willoughby says, “I went down to University of Texas and took a three-day class in how to butcher a cow, in which we divided up into teams, chose a cow, watched it slaughtered, then butchered it. Nothing like first-hand experience.” ~BETSY BLOCK

O P E N B O O K

Seeing and Observing

Drawing on Sherlock Holmes, Maria Konnikova '05—the proprietor of *Scientific American's* “Literally Psyched” column, now a doctoral student in psychology at Columbia—presents an elementary lesson (and some advanced ones) on enhancing one’s mental prowess. Konnikova clearly recalls details better than Watson did, in this passage from the “prelude” to *Mastermind: How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes* (Viking, \$26.95).

When I was little, my dad used to read us Sherlock Holmes stories before bed. While my brother often took the opportunity to fall promptly asleep on his corner of the couch, the rest of us listened intently. I remember the big leather armchair where my dad sat, holding the book out in front of him with one arm, the dancing flames from the fireplace reflecting in his black-framed glasses. I remember the rise and fall of his voice as the suspense mounted beyond all breaking point, and finally, finally, at long last the awaited solution, when it all made sense and I’d shake my head, just like Dr. Watson, and think, *Of course; it’s all so simple now that he says it*. I remember the smell of the pipe that my dad himself would smoke every so often, a fruity, earthy mix that made its way into the folds of the leather chair, and the outlines of the night through the curtained French windows. His pipe, of course, was ever-so-slightly curved just like Holmes’s. And I remember that final slam of the book, the thick pages coming together between the crimson covers, when he’d announce, “That’s it for tonight.”...

And then there’s the one thing that wedged its way so deeply into my brain that it remained there, taunting me, for years to come, when the rest of the stories had long since faded into some indeterminate background and the adventures of Holmes and his faithful Boswell were all but forgotten: the steps.

The steps to 221B Baker Street. How many were there? It’s the question Holmes brought before Watson in “A Scandal in Bohemia,” and a question that never once since left my mind. As



Holmes and Watson sit in their matching armchairs, the detective instructs the doctor on the difference between seeing and observing. Watson is baffled. And then, all at once everything becomes crystal clear...

“You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room.”

“Frequently.”

“How often?”

“Well, some hundreds of times.”

“Then how many are there?”

“How many? I don’t know.”

“Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, I know that there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed.”

...What I couldn’t understand then was that Holmes... had been honing a method of mindful interaction with the world. The Baker Street steps? Just a way of showing off a skill that now came so naturally to him that it didn’t require the least bit of thought. A by-the-way manifestation of a process that was habitually, almost subconsciously, unfolding in his constantly active mind. A trick, if you will, of no real consequence, and yet with the most profound implications if you stopped to consider what made it possible. A trick that inspired me to write an entire book in its honor.