

Lucia's Survival Guide and Cookbook

Lucille Campilongo

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We all like to think that our mothers are saints, but when Lucille Campilongo's children called her Santa Lucia, they made sure the rest of the world could learn how and why. The children recently published this book from a survival guide and cookbook that Lucille wrote almost thirty years ago for her daughter who was about to live abroad for a semester. As Lucia writes in her foreword, "she knew nothing of cooking or practical, everyday matters....Each time I thought of a problem she might have, I picked up the notebook and wrote like crazy. I wanted to give my daughter a part of me to take with her."

Lucia was born in the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco to Italian immigrant parents. Growing up, she observed old Italian ladies on her block sharing household wisdom and recipes. Realizing her own children had missed out on this kind of education, she wanted to provide them with a manual for such home affairs when they finally set out on their own.

Although the book is largely a compilation of delicious-sounding Sicily-influenced Italian recipes, there is an early section dedicated to more general advice. Lucille covers what to look for when choosing an apartment (check for evidence of rodents or insects), what supplies you will need (lots of dish towels) and what to buy to start a working pantry. The pantry list is long and daunting, but as she says, you could create a litany of meals from just these items alone.

Lucille then moves along to the recipe section, whose options are perfect for the newbie cook who has neither the patience, skill, or budget for any complicated meal. The meals include Chicken Cacciatore, which she says is a "complete meal in one dish"; Linguine with White Clam Sauce, which she claims is not only easy but a good dish to serve company; and hearty fare like Meatloaf and Roast Chicken. She includes hints and important cooking tricks as well as mother-laced truisms on eating right.

There are some very minor pitfalls here. The book was, after all, only intended for the eyes of her own children so it's understandable that readers will come across terms that are not explained, like "fryer" or "consume." And the ample space reserved after each recipe for notes would be better used for more recipes. Lucille ends the survival guide with the ultimate in motherly advice: "Eat sensibly and I'm sure you will feel good, and when you feel good and have energy, you will do good!"

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