

Missy Singer DuMars [00:00:00]:

Welcome to another episode of Women in Food. I'm your hostess, Missy Singer Dumars. This podcast is all about the intersection of three things food, business, and the feminine. Each episode, I invite you to sit down with me and my interview guest as we dive into this intersection to spark your food curiosity, share a favorite recipe, and give you some fun food explorations along the way. I'm inspired by these women farmers, chefs, bakers, cooks, writers, artists and food makers who all bring their passion for beauty, nourishment community, pleasure, connection, and deep care to others through food. These are women who advocate and take action towards increased food awareness for themselves, their families and their neighborhoods. Before I introduce today's guest, I have one request. If you could go over to itunes or whatever app you're using to listen and give us a rating and review. It's a simple act that helps us a ton. Thank you so much. So today I am super excited to introduce to you Lisa Herwitz. Having had a life that weaves through the worlds of arts, film and food that started with her college days discovering cafeterias and working at the local movie theater as a projectionist, Lisa went on to New York City, where she worked as a publicist for an Italian public relations firm, supporting a number of Italian food and restaurant brands. I've brought her to Women in Food because of her first feature film, *The Automat*, about the horn and Hard art restaurants of the 1920s to 60s, which premiered at the 2021 Telluride Film Festival and went on to be one of the highest grossing documentaries of 2022. If you're a younger person or didn't grow up in the New York City and Philadelphia areas before the 1990s, you may have no idea what an automat is, but we will tell you, I promise. I had the gift of going to the very last one in New York City a couple of times as a kid, and I was instantly delighted by it. So, needless to say, I have watched Lisa's film three or four, maybe five or six times already, and I just had to bring Lisa on to the podcast. We're going to get into Automats, why they elicit such strong emotional reactions, the lessons this business story has for us today, and, of course, an original recipe from *The Horn and Hardart Automat*. We'll also talk about how Elisa self distributed this film through her own company, A Slice of Pie Productions, the challenges of being a woman entrepreneur in the film industry, and how she took her own, dare I say, feminine approach to bringing the automat to all of us. By the way, if you'd like to watch the film, you can find it streaming on HBO, Max Canopy and for rent on Amazon. In addition to most major online platforms. I'll put all the links in the show notes for you. I definitely recommend watching it. So, having said all of that. Lisa. Welcome to Women in Food. I'm so honored and so happy to have you join us to share a bit of the automat story and your own entrepreneur journey. Welcome.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:03:01]:

Thank you, Missy, for making an exception so that a documentary filmmaker could be on the podcast. Granted, I'm a food documentary filmmaker, but still.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:03:12]:

But still and still you are a food documentary filmmaker. And I love tell us a little bit about why the automat and the well, okay. Start with what is an automat and maybe even a quick little history of the Horn and Hard art automats.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:03:30]:

Sure. So basically, in the 1880s, these two restaurateurs came together. One who had some money to spend and the other one who had some skill to lend, and they decided to start a lunchroom in Philadelphia. So the automat was first not really in the business of technology, not until the turn of the century. That was when they upon taking a vacation to Europe, one of them thought, you know, I really liked this concept that I saw in Germany. I'm going to import one to the United States. And that became the first horn and Hardart automat and the first automat in the US. It was in Philadelphia. And in 1902, you put a coin in a slot, you opened up a little glass window and took out a place of pie or what have you. And this ended up becoming a huge fad across America. You would see automat cafeteria operated by different companies throughout the country. But when we talk about automats, the one that is most iconic to this day is the Horn and Hardart chain, which became, in just volume alone, between New York and Philadelphia. It became the largest restaurant chain in America, and it also just became a huge American cultural institution and an iconic part of visiting New York City. It was something that people would look forward to going to. And I've attended screenings all over the country of this film. And what amazes me is that every time I have a screening, at least a quarter of the room, no matter where I am, has been to a Horn and Hardart automat. I was in Mississippi, and 50% of the people in that theater raised their hands. They went to New York City and they visited the automat. So it's something that so many people across America share in common, which is just so beautiful. And the film really resonates with all different kinds of people, just like how the automats attracted all different kinds of people.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:06:01]:

Yeah. And I'll say, I remember my parents taking us to the automat, probably the last one in New York City a couple of times. And it is super magical. And the automat in the 1980s isn't even anywhere near the glory of what they were in their heyday. However, as a kid, it was just so cool to put at that time, probably a quarter or a couple of quarters in a slot and you open this door and there were people behind there just for our listeners who don't know the automat. There were like these big drums that would rotate and people were putting fresh food, not packaged or anything like that into the slots. And actually, one of my favorite cultural references you share is what was it? Candid Camera or something like that, where they keep spitting the plate back out again and towards the end of your film. It was just such a funny scene where the doors don't work properly and the hand reaches through the door at the person, the customer on the other side. And it was super funny.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:07:08]:

It's a funny story how we ended up with 30 seconds of Candid Camera in the documentary. But I think my editor must have been a big Candid Camera fan. We were going through like, 40 plus TV shows and movie scenes that had automats. And the one that gets the most playtime is Candid Camera and the Funt Family, which still owns Candid Camera. They were just really generous with the licensing and otherwise it wouldn't have been possible to include that much. But that was just a really funny every episode of Candid Camera I'm sure was funny, but a lot of people got a good laugh out of that one.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:07:57]:

Yeah. And, I mean, there's the Flintstones had references. I think The Jetsons also had an automat reference. Is that right? And then so many old, like, grand Hollywood movies and so many, so many and I actually remember and when I mentioned this, people most people don't know it. I don't think you knew it when I mentioned it to you. I remember as a kid reading a book called the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil e finkweiler. I want to make sure I say that name correctly. Yeah. And the mixed up files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler by E. L. Conningsburg about these two kids who run away from home and they camp out in the Metropolitan Museum of Art to try and figure out this interesting mystery. And so they collect coins from the water fountain and they go to the automat to eat. And there's just something about that in a children's book, which was it was written in 1967, the novel so right in the time of kind of the end of the height of the automat. And that's a reference I remember, that most people don't remember.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:09:09]:

But yeah, place that fascinated kids and that parents could depend on families were they and I mean, the automats really marketed towards families. They were a very wholesome place. They did not serve alcohol, and it was part of their image. And how cool that this place that attracted families could also attract people going out on dates and people going by themselves and people taking a lunch break. It's amazing how many different kinds of people they could attract, but there really was something for everyone there.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:09:50]:

Yeah. And that is one of the inspiring parts of the business story of the Automat to me was how it was a great leveler of people and for our listeners to imagine these automats, there weren't really waiters or waitresses. You got your food and there was just an open space with tables and beautiful space like marble top tables and beautiful Art Deco decor in many of the spots in their heyday and these beautiful buildings. And you just sat down at a table. And if there were no empty tables, but there was an empty chair at someone else's table, you would often just sit down there and have a conversation and meet someone new. And that's an interesting thing. And you don't see that too much anymore today, although it kind of shows up in a different way in coffee shops and cafes.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:10:41]:

Before the pandemic, I was seeing more of these communal dining tables at restaurants. But I think that we're going to have to challenge ourselves to get back to that. But I do like that trend, and that is a trend in the spirit of the Automat 100%.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:11:02]:

Indeed. Indeed. And I know that and you talk about this in the film, that the automat actually was an inspiration for one of the more well known coffee shop franchises in the world, Starbucks. And he talks about that inspiration of exactly that experience of being able to sit somewhere and it being welcoming to everybody and anybody to sit down and have a cup of coffee. And it's true that Horn and Hardart started with coffee, right?

Lisa Hurwitz [00:11:33]:

They did start with coffee, and it was part of their success. They popularized the New Orleans drip style coffee in Philadelphia. And it was not the popular coffee style at that point. Coffee was still being clarified using eggshells. But they made a really good coffee that everybody wanted. And it's one of the things that they're the most famous for and remembered for to this day. Just having really excellent coffee that in its heyday was only a nickel, right?

Missy Singer DuMars [00:12:18]:

And for our listeners, you'd put a nickel in and it had this very famous dolphin head spout and you'd put your cup underneath and it would pour the perfect cup of coffee with just the right of milk, right amount of milk, if you wanted milk, and nice and hot and freshly brewed. And that was actually a mechanical piece of magic that that happened like that. Isn't that you got a little behind the scenes experience of that magic?

Lisa Hurwitz [00:12:45]:

I think it's completely whimsical and beautiful how they served a cup of coffee on the rear of the machine, which you don't see from the dining room. The interior is where the kitchen is. It's not where all the cooking happens because they did have a central commissary, but kind of final prep happened in this kitchen. And so in the back, you had a really, for its time, advanced kind of technological operation where people were using these coin operated machines to deliver the food. There's this remarkable footage that we found from an old Paramount Newsreel where they were filming at the automat and they were filming on the other side of the machines back where the employees are working and they're feeding the food into the rear side. And it's remarkable. You can see the footage of showing how the coffee mechanism is working on the backside when somebody would put their coin in. This is very high tech for 1920, mind you.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:14:07]:

Yeah, absolutely. And just that they developed these machines that could pour the perfect amount and deliver it hot every time, for the coffee, at least. And the other mechanics for the drums behind the little windows from the front side. As a kid, it seemed magical because it just like food appeared and it was freshly made. And that day, usually. And like you mentioned, they eventually went to a commissary model, which is a great example of figuring out how to scale up and maintain commitment to quality and fresh food and a certain experience they wanted to provide their customers at the same time, which I think is a question a lot of business owners sit with very often is like, how do I maintain the quality and what I'm known for and what I've created and scale up at the same time?

Lisa Hurwitz [00:15:04]:

I'd be very interested to hear from some businesses today that are using that same commissary type model. It definitely was a very important factor in Horn and Hardart's success. And they had a mindset of keeping things local, of keeping things fresh. And this huge volume that they were able to produce really helped them keep things cost efficient. And as a result, the prices for the customers were very low, which is part of why they were so popular.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:15:43]:

Yeah, and I love some of the footage you share where you see, like, crates of fresh produce and boxes of potatoes and things coming into the commissary. And like you said, I feel like there's things to learn in studying how they scaled up fresh, local food in such a way that now we go to industrial, processed food for that kind of scale. And they were, like you said, the largest restaurant chain in America. At least until McDonald's got bigger than that. But that was for a very long time that they really had that market cornered and had figured out something really special. And I think one of the things I will admit, the first time I saw the film in a theater and my friend who came with me can tell you, I cried my eyes out so many times because that's what happens when I get really inspired. I cry out of joy and excitement and inspiration. I've almost got tears thinking about it now. But what really cracked my heart open were these business lessons. And that was one of them. Like, how do you scale? How do you grow and stick to your integrity, stick to your values. And I think that was a really big part of what was special about the Horn and Hardart automats besides the simple cool factor of the automat itself. And I'm curious, as you learn those stories, what really inspired you about what they created?

Lisa Hurwitz [00:17:27]:

It's really hard to kind of just narrow it down to a couple.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:17:31]:

Well, you can say more than a couple.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:17:33]:

Yeah. I think it's really beautiful how they were able to make something that was so profitable, but also so I'm somebody who's really for the people. I wear my values on my sleeve. I'm really passionate about social justice and making the world a better place. I really love how revolutionary the Automat feels in its business mentality. And I don't think that that's what they were thinking is, oh, we're going to be revolutionary. But I think they ran a business according to their values and they decided that they were going to make the space feel so welcoming and inclusive. They decided they wanted immigrants to feel welcome. They decided to go after women as customers when women had been kind of ignored by restaurants in the past. Women could not go to restaurants historically without a man to accompany her. They decided to have high quality ingredients and to have affordable prices and to create spaces that were inspiring and dignified and that they were going to.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:19:17]:

Be.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:19:17]:

A place where people of different races could integrate and feel comfortable. They let the people kind of take over the restaurant. In a way, it really became the People's restaurant. So I think that there's just so many incredible things about it and the way that they scaled up their business and they did so without interfering with other businesses either. They didn't expand beyond New York and Philadelphia. Like in around 1920, they did try to go to Boston and Chicago and they really realized how this model that they had of volume where they really had things scaled up in New York and Philadelphia and without Boston and Chicago were a little too far away. They couldn't really monitor what was happening there. And this high quality that they had created in these two cities already, it was hard to kind of replicate it, and they stuck with what worked for them. And today in business, there's this idea that you have to have global domination. And I love that they focused on two cities, and that was good enough. So I think that's a beautiful concept, just kind of respecting the territory of others and allowing other entrepreneurs to be successful. I think the number one most kind of important message, though, is to be providing something good for your customers. Not just something that's going to make you money, but something that'll make you money. And that's going to be good for them. And that is, unfortunately, something that I'd like to see more of. It's just so innovative, what they were doing for their time and how they were just so artful and it was really beautiful what they made.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:21:46]:

Yeah, that's definitely one of the things I was super inspired by. And what you didn't tap into right now, but you do a lot in the film, is not just that care of quality and integrity for their

customers, but also the care for their employees. And I've not seen or heard of a business story where multi generations in the same family work for the company, joyfully, happily, feeling well cared for with so much. I think you talked about this in the film, Loyalty, because Horn and Hardart really created a community out of their staff and their team and their employees and cared for them. And it was like that same care both inside the business and with their customers. I think that's part of what people felt and experienced, whether they knew it or not, was that that integrity and those values were across the entire business. Not just on the face of the business to show the customers, but also behind the scenes and how they cared for their employees and provided for them in so many ways and honored them and celebrated them and took care of them in times of challenge. And Horn and Hard Art survived through the Depression and through world wars and all kinds of intense cultural things in America. And I think part of that survival was that level of care and maintaining those values, which to me is an inspiration and a lesson on how to run a business. For sure.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:23:38]:

For sure. And hopefully maybe they'll be teaching Horn and Hard art in business school classes.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:23:47]:

Wouldn't that be magical? That would be super magical. So I want to go back to a little bit more about all the films you could create, all the documentaries you could create. Why the automat? What's your relationship to food? Why this? What? I mean, obviously the story is magical because we've been talking about it, but what really sparked your curiosity to dive deeper and then share the story with the world?

Lisa Hurwitz [00:24:18]:

I just liked it and I didn't know that I was going to end up making a film. I was going to spend so many years doing it. I definitely wasn't trying to spread the gospel of the automat. It was my personal pleasure to do it. And then over the years, I started to take it more seriously and realize this is something valuable to make widely available. But really, it was just my own personal intrigue and having fun, I'd say.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:25:02]:

And I feel like the way you tell the story and the parts of the story that you highlight, the pieces that we've been talking about, this sense of community and welcoming and togetherness that the automat created really goes back to your own story and relationship to food and meal times and the discovery of cafeterias. Tell us a little bit about that because I think that actually comes through in just the style of your storytelling and how you shared the story of the automat.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:25:33]:

For whatever reason, I think I've always been a foodie, and it's hard to pinpoint exactly where that began. But definitely during college at the latest, because I did have this public access cooking show that I starred in and edited and produced, and I also was volunteering at the food co op as a working member stalking the bulk aisle. And of course, I was pretty dead serious about my school cafeteria at that time and researching cafeterias in the school library. But that I'd say we could track my automat journey really back to that. And I even recall one documentary about food that really stuck with me, and I kind of used as a model as I was doing the automat. But there was a documentary called Deli Man. There's a documentary called Deli Man. It's the story of the American Jewish deli. And I was just so blown away by it, and it was so informative and fun and moving just to go eat at deli's all the time. But to realize that it's what a tradition, it's a part of and kind of the legacy that it represents and just how people are really struggling to keep them going. It made them mean so much more to me by seeing the documentary. And I know that when people see the automat who went there, it really elevates their appreciation for the automat because they might have liked it before, but then after watching the movie, they're like, oh my gosh, this is fascinating. I'm so glad I know this now.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:27:49]:

And something you shared with me. We're going to get personal here. One of the things you shared with me is that in your childhood, dining alone, eating a meal alone, was a common thing for you, and that was part of what cracked you open. Stepping into cafeteria experience was the sense of community food, community dining.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:28:16]:

This is completely true. By the time I showed up at college, I had gone through a childhood of dining alone at dinner time because my parents were both working often late and kind of a bit of a, I don't know, divisive or stratified is the word. In high school, we were eating pretty separately. We were not eating in one communal dining hall, but we were spread out around the campus and everybody was with their own friend groups. So it was really revolutionary for me to arrive at university and be able to eat whenever I wanted. It's not like I had to let's say I wanted to eat with my parents. I'd have to wait until really late for them to arrive so we could eat together. But in the cafeteria, I could go whenever I wanted and I would always have somebody to eat with and they would always be friendly. And that is really why I was so turned on to cafeteria. I thought they were just my cafeteria was just such a wonderful place to be that I could depend on, and I knew that I was going to have a good experience.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:29:55]:

Yeah, and this kind of brings up something you and I have talked about and you talk about in the film, although not necessarily as directly, but about Automats coffee shops, cafeteria being what some people call the third place. Our first place is our home, and the people in our home, our second place is often work and the people we work with, where we many times spend



more time there than at home. And there have been some sociology, writers and sociologists who talk about the third place, which is usually not home or work, where we spend time. And a cafeteria, the way you described the cafeteria was exactly that. I think a lot of us, not so much since the pandemic, but pre pandemic coffee shops, were certainly that place. And I think the Automat wasn't a really early example of the third place, that kind of equalizing place to spend time. And you have interviews in the film. I love the interview with Ruth Bader Ginsburg where she talks about reading and studying and working there. Working. That's what I do at a cafe. I sometimes specifically go to a cafe just to get work done. And it's interesting to me that the Automat is just such an early example, that kind of third place experience.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:31:26]:

Third place is something that is studied in hospitality and sociology and a kind of descendant of the Automat that is widely regarded as a third place is the coffee shop. And the horn and Hardart. Automat was a place that you could go, and it would be like an extension of your living room. It would be a second home. It was a place that you felt very comfortable and welcome.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:32:03]:

Yeah, I guess that's the thing about a third place, is that it feels like a home away from home. And I did a little looking into what third place really means, and it was interesting to me because when I looked at what's written as sort of the characteristics of a third place, the Automat really fits all of them. And you tell that story in the documentary about it being this neutral place where everybody is welcome. It levels everyone's status, societal status. It's a place for conversation and connection sharing. There's often people who are regulars there, and you interview a few people who were regulars at the Automat and knew exactly what they got every single day. There was accessibility for all kinds of people and needs. It was a very open place. You didn't need a membership or exclusivity to access it. And it was a beautiful and fun place to be like you were talking about the cafeteria being kind of a fun place and really a home away from home. And what I appreciate is the way that you tell all that and give us history and give us emotional connection all in one story. And it's no surprise to me that a third place is commonly centered around food. And to me, that's actually a very feminine perspective. And my listeners know I talk about hearthcraft as feminine and women's work, for lack of a better word. And the third place, be it at an automat or coffee shop, is very much an alternate hearth to gather around. And hearthcraft is more than providing food. Hearthcraft is about nourishment on all levels on your mind, exchanging of ideas, spirit and heart, connection to others. To me, there's just something lovely about seeing a very successful food business focused on that entire experience and understanding that hospitality is more than here's some food go away. Hospitality is a way of being and a way of showing up and a way of caring for others.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:34:35]:

They definitely created a space that was really special, that made people feel incredibly good. And it's easier said than done. But to make magic is, for lack of words, magical.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:34:58]:

Right. What would you say is one of your favorite moments in making this film?

Lisa Hurwitz [00:35:03]:

Wow, one of my favorite moments.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:35:05]:

I imagine there's many it seems like such a fun film to make, but what was a favorite or particularly remarkable moment for you?

Lisa Hurwitz [00:35:16]:

It was really incredible hearing Colin Powell talk about how important the automat was in terms of diversity. I didn't tell him what to say. He just kind of went it was unbelievable.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:35:40]:

You did fix his tie, if I recall. Yeah, that was such an adorable moment.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:35:48]:

It was unbelievable. These people who agreed to be interviewed and the things that they had to say that I didn't have to tell them to say. I had this hunch that this was an important American institution and then some of the most important then living Americans were telling me how important it was. So it was really good for my confidence. I had an idea, and these people told me that my idea was important. And that sort of experience is priceless.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:36:42]:

Right. So one of the fun parts in the film is when you have all these folks that you interviewed talk about what they loved to eat at Hornet Hardart and their favorite food from there. And there are certain ones that certainly pop out over and over and over again. And in a moment, I want to talk about that more and also talk about your journey as a woman filmmaker, entrepreneur, and kind of how you brought this film to the marketplace, which is really different than traditional films. But before we get into recipes and favorite foods from Horn and Hardart and being a woman entrepreneur, I want to take a quick break and share a bit more about how women and food is supported. So, as my listeners know, I care a lot about food and land and third includes the success of food and land based businesses. I really believe that

sustainability goes beyond land sustainability to how we grow ourselves and our business at the same time. I've noticed that many folks in the food and land space have fantastic concepts and strong passion and deep care, but still struggle to market and run their business in ways that can make the impact they envision while also providing for themselves at the same time. I always say that most farmers I know are great farmers, but dread or avoid the sales and marketing and business aspect of having a farm. I'm the other way around. Farming is my learning curve, but I know and love business really well. Besides hosting this podcast and running my farm, I'm a business coach and consultant and have coached hundreds of entrepreneurs from across the world in a range of industries to mindfully grow their business. So if you're listening to this podcast as a food or land based entrepreneur or who knows someone who's a food or land based entrepreneur who's looking to what the next phase of growth for their business is, this kind of coaching could be for you. If you'd like to have support in this way, you can go to my website and have a 90 minutes session with me. The website is [Womeninfood Networkwithmissy](#) and the link is also in the show notes as well. Here's the deal. I want every listener to thrive and particularly land and food businesses to thrive because honestly, I believe that when land and food businesses are successful, that means the success of our humanity's future. So once again, the link for more information is [Womeninfood Networkwithmissy](#). So Lisa, one of the things your guests and your interviews talk about, like everybody shares their favorite food from the Automat. Why don't you tell us about what some of those were and what some of the fun stories were about the foods from Horn and Hardart?

Lisa Hurwitz [00:39:40]:

The ones I get the most are the cream spinach, the macaroni and cheese, the baked beans.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:39:47]:

Baked beans, yeah.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:39:48]:

The pies. Yeah, those are definitely the top items, but I'll get all sorts of outliers. Everybody had their own favorite. Like Ruth Bader Ginsburg was really into the sweets and the hot chocolate. And interestingly, Howard Schultz never tried the coffee at the Automat since he was going there as a boy before he started drinking drinking coffee. Coffee. But I do think that for me it would have been the macaroni and cheese and the cream spinach. I love American comfort food, so it's really like the perfect category. The fact that that's what the Automat was chiefly known for is like perfect for me.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:40:43]:

And actually their food got so famous they started to open shops where you could go buy a whole pie and bring it home and had a whole series of a portion of the business that was that.

And I loved the marketing campaign, or slogan for that, please share with our listeners what that was because it's super fun.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:41:04]:

One of their advertising slogans was Less Work for Mother retail shops. So Horn and Hardart had their automats, and they also had these stores where you could go buy the food that was being served at the automat so that you could serve it at home. Also, it's covered in the documentary. They had a television show that they sponsored, which was a children's talent competition. And the theme song for this program was Less Work for Mother.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:41:44]:

And there's a number of well known actors and actresses who got their start on that television show. Right?

Lisa Hurwitz [00:41:50]:

Definitely. And another kind of way to make it really clear that this food business really permeated people's lives in so many other ways than just the food. It really was a part of the culture, and it also was the start for quite a few household names now.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:42:17]:

Right. And so I will admit myself that it's really difficult to find Horn and Hardart recipes. You got to have a little legwork. There's definitely some very fascinating discussion forums out there, people sharing what they think the recipes are and debating about the ingredients and all kinds of things like that. But you being a master researcher who knows how to follow her curiosity really well. You did come upon a couple of, I guess I would say, marketing campaigns where Horn and Hardart, in their heyday in the 60s, actually printed some of their recipes in the New York Daily News and the New York Post. And so you're going to share one of those recipes with us, right?

Lisa Hurwitz [00:43:08]:

Yes. I was going through the company's archive, which is at the New York Public Library, and I came across some news clippings where the company supplied a modified version of their classic dishes for print. And keep in mind, the original recipes were for huge volumes. So I personally question I'm not a chef, but I think a chef would probably say that when you have a recipe that's that huge of a volume, you can't actually scale that recipe accurately down for, like, four people. But what do I know? As I mentioned to you, I tried preparing a couple of these items with questionable results.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:44:05]:

But that's all right. We're going to share, I think, the macaroni and cheese. What I love, and I'll put this in the links on the website, in the show notes, is the original scans from the archives that you found of the newsprint. And I love that. On the side it says, these famous recipes have never been published. Now you know some of our secrets. And so I feel like now we're revealing on a podcast some of these secrets. But if it was printed on a newspaper, that means it's widely available and it was interesting. I'm just going to be completely transparent with our audience. You and I were talking before we hit the record button about trying out these recipes. And you had a couple of different iterations or versions of it from one from 1963, another from 1968, another from somewhere else. And some of the ingredient quantities didn't quite match. And I'll also say, and this is for my listeners, I love cookbook and recipe archives and old recipes. And when you get into them, sometimes the instructions are super vague and you have to have a little bit of culinary skill to actually know what they're talking about. So we're going to talk about the baked macaroni and cheese recipe, and I will help out with some of the vague instructions.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:45:22]:

Oh, yes, this is exciting for me. Now you can demystify it.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:45:26]:

Yeah. And one of the most fun things is that it's pretty much a basic, what I would consider pretty basic macaroni and cheese recipe. But there is one, what I would call secret ingredient or interesting ingredient that I was surprised to see.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:45:41]:

And that is that would be diced canned tomatoes.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:45:46]:

Yes. And I don't remember picturing, I'm sure as a kid I probably had mac and cheese. And at the automat, I don't remember noticing tomatoes because as a kid, most likely I would not have eaten macaroni and cheese if I had a lot of visible tomatoes. So I imagine that it melts right in. I will put the whole recipe in the show notes. And really a macaroni and cheese recipe, you're going to make usually a roux, which is flour and butter cooked together. And then you add milk, which makes it a Beshamal, basically, which is a cream sauce. And then you add the cheese in that, which makes it a cheese sauce. And that's the basics of the recipe. You can kind of tell the time of the recipe because they talk about melting butter in a double boiler these days.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:46:34]:

Why does it need to be in a double boiler?

Missy Singer DuMars [00:46:37]:

That's a great question. I tend to melt butter, not in a double boiler. I don't have a microwave, so I do it on the stove. However, if you do it, a double boiler does a gentle cooking without burning because you don't have heat directly on the surface of the pot that the food is touching. And so for something like butter, using a double boiler is great because it won't become browned butter, which is a different thing and a different flavor. You won't overcook the butter. It will just melt it into a nice melty state. And double boilers are often used to melt things like chocolate for the same reason. Because if you put chocolate in a pot right on the stove and I've made this mistake, it gets too hot and the parts touching the pot will burn. But a double boiler is surrounded by water, so it's a gentler cooking process and slightly more even cooking process, heating process, being surrounded by water, it's very similar to cooking a custard in a ban marie in some ways, where you put your custard cups in another casserole dish with hot water and bake it that way. It keeps it from overcooking on the edges, because if you put custard cups straight into the oven, like on a cookie sheet, the edges are going to get really browned and crispy and the center won't cook as much, whereas when you surround it with water, you get a more even cook. And the same with melting butter in a double boiler. But you can melt butter in the microwave, which is what a lot of people do today, or you can melt butter in a pot. You just want to keep the flame super low and have patience. If you do it that way, instead of trying to rush through it and.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:48:17]:

Do it fast, I noticed that it was pretty slow to incorporate to melt the Cheddar. The shredded Cheddar into the roux on a double boiler was pretty slow.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:48:36]:

Yeah, it is slower. However, it can't overcook and you don't burn it. Yeah, and it's fun. I have my grandmother's double boiler, which is an old glass pyrex double boiler. So it's a glass within a glass and they fit together. But for my listeners, if you don't have a double boiler but you want to follow the recipe exactly, using a double boiler, you can actually just put like a metal bowl over a pot of water, so it's the steam or the water touching the bowl. You just don't want whatever vessel you're using to be touching your burner directly. It's so funny to think about this. I teach kids certain days of the week at our county fairgrounds about various farm to table topics, and last month I was talking about greenhouses and teaching kids three ways heat transfer. And so now, like, we're talking about double boilers. That's what's in my head is about how heat gets from a flame into the food and what kind of heat transfer that is. It's just such a funny thing. And how double boilers change that and help that. So there's your little science whoa. Geekry. Because the whole class was on ways that we use science, technology, engineering, and math in farm life, which we yeah, so basically our while I have you.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:50:02]:

Though, can I also ask go ahead. So the recipe calls for wait a minute, who's interviewing.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:50:10]:

White and red pepper? Yeah.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:50:12]:

So is that at all special or is macaroni and cheese pretty like and what's the difference between using white pepper and black pepper?

Missy Singer DuMars [00:50:21]:

Well, white pepper, I believe, is definitely zippier.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:50:26]:

I like that word, zippier.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:50:28]:

Yeah. It also doesn't have flex in the sauce. You can't see it. It's usually more powdered, a finer powder, so it incorporates better. But also it's interesting you say that, because I believe it's Julia Child hollandaise. It's either the hollandaise or the mayo, which are the two recipes I look to the most often in Julie Child. Those two and quiches those three recipes are the Julie Child recipes that are, like, on my kitchen counter at all times. And either I always forget if it's the hollandaise or the mayo. You use white pepper specifically, and she also it's very similar to this, where it's just a dash dash because it's very strong. But I think that's why it has a little bit of a different flavor. It incorporates better. And then the red peppers to make it a little spicy. Red peppers.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:51:25]:

And then they tell you to add sugar to the tomatoes.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:51:28]:

My gosh, yeah, it depends on the canned tomatoes, because that's a place where with sugar, I would probably taste the tomatoes a little bit first because some jarred and canned tomatoes are very sweet and some are more acidic, and so it can balance the flavor out, and probably it helps balance the tomato enos out. So the mac and cheese doesn't taste like tomatoes, but the flavor of tomato. There's so many recipes that add a little bit of tomato paste or add a little bit of tomatoes in for people who are into tomatoes, bring out a very, umami, flavor. And so that

enhances the kind of savoriness that would be my guess as to why the tomatoes are in there and why you balance it with sugar so it's not too tomato acidic. So for our listeners, we're talking about the recipe without saying the recipe. The basics are you cook your macaroni, you're going to make the cheese sauce, which you're going to melt the butter. You're going to add the flour and salt and the pepper in. That's going to make your roux. And then you add the milk and cream and stir that, and that makes your Beshamal. And then you add the cheese. And then you remove it from the heat. And then you mix it with the macaroni. And then you could put whatever mix in. So you could probably skip the tomatoes and sugar, which goes in at that stage, or add it in, and then you bake it so that it gets all brown. And I love the instructions. It just says bake until surface browns. It does give you an oven temperature, but it doesn't give you how many minutes. So if you need to this is really about learning how to bake by sight and texture and not by numbers. A lot of old recipes are like that. They don't really tell you everything. They assume basic kitchen experience.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:53:29]:

So elbow macaroni, which is what the recipe calls for, is pretty small. Do you really think that the macaroni at the automat was that small?

Missy Singer DuMars [00:53:43]:

I don't remember the one time I was there.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:53:46]:

But like, macaroni that's that small, like, I like a bigger noodle.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:53:51]:

So use a different noodle next time.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:53:53]:

I know, but I think the thing.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:53:54]:

About elbow, if you're going to use a different noodle, one of the things people who are into pasta and noodles is to have awareness of what kind of sauce and how it clings or sticks to the noodle, right? So the nice thing about an elbow macaroni is that the cheese sauce kind of clings to the elbow, the bend and goes in the holes a little bit. And so when you take a bite of macaroni, you're not getting a piece of pasta that all the sauce slid off. That's the same thing with, like, a fusilli or why even a rigatoni often has ridges, is to hold the sauce, pick up the sauce so totally can pick another shape, if that's what you want or that's what you have access to. But



I would say make sure it's a shape that the sauce can cling to. And one of the Little Chefy secrets I know, I don't know that third is true with a macaroni and cheese. But if you're making a pasta sauce, this was revolutionary when I learned it. We're totally getting into pasta making geekry. And I was just telling someone about this recently, but when I started watching cheese make pastas and sauces, it's like you have your pot of water really well, salted, like it should almost taste like ocean water. You cook your pasta in that you have a pan next to you or a pot next to you with the sauce. And when you add the pasta to the sauce, let's say it's a red sauce or even an Alfredo or something like that, you add the pasta into the pan not to dump all the water, but to scoop the pasta out and hang on to the water, because the water has all these starches from the pasta cooking. And once you've mixed the pasta into the sauce, if you throw a splash or two of the pasta water with all the starches in, it actually helps bring the sauce together with the pasta better, helps it all cling. It's kind of this magic I don't fully know the chemistry chemistry about it, but it's this magic thing. So it's so funny because I no longer use my strainers and dump the pasta into a strainer. I have like a big strainer spoon, and I scoop the pasta out of the pot, and then part of it's, the pasta will absorb a lot of liquid of the sauce. So then the sauce kind of gets chunky and doesn't have enough liquid to it. And so you can add some water, but the starches in the water kind of help emulsify the sauce and help it cling a little better. So you can probably find a way to do that with the macaroni and cheese as well. So if the cheese sauce gets too thick and gloppy, that would be another reason to scoop up some of the pasta water and toss it in there to thin it out but still have it cling. It's almost like adding a little extra starch to it to help it cling. So that's the cheferly secret. I know about cooking. Pasta and sauces. That's it. That's all I got for you.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:56:45]:

Around culinary, that's a lot.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:56:47]:

Yeah, well, I cook a lot. I cook everything from scratch, so that happens. Thank you for sharing these recipes. Lisa shared with me the archive recipes. They're slightly hard to read, but we'll try and get a better version. And if it's okay, I'm going to share with our audience all four. We have the horn and hard art mac and cheese, the creamed spinach, the chicken pie, which is like a chicken pot pie and a beef stew, the four you sent me. And so since you can do your own research and find these recipes, I feel pretty safe in posting them. But we'll share all four of them, especially the mac and cheese in our show notes. And I want to get a little bit you've shared with me a little bit about you took a really different approach to how you got your film, this film out there, and I'd love to hear a little bit more about that because it's different from standard film industry practice. And I feel like to me, that was part of about how you bring a feminine perspective into business and into telling this story.

Lisa Hurwitz [00:57:51]:

For sure. The distribution of this film is very much in the spirit of the automat, which, if I had to kind of boil down, like, what on earth? It means that I just said the automat. Even though it was a corporation, it was really egalitarian in spirit, and it was really kind of a humanistic business model. It was about togetherness. It was about giving people the best. It was about looking out for each other. And unfortunately, with the current, I'd say film distribution landscape, and I'll kind of zone in right now on let's just talk about independent documentaries. There's a trend right now where kind of film distribution is really dominated by the streamers, and they've decided that they want to make their own documentaries. They aren't going to be acquiring them. And that's sort of traditionally how someone like me would get their film out there. In the past, you'd make your film independently and then you'd sell it. And it's very unreliable to be able to do that these days. And I was hoping that I'd be able to finish the film, premiere it at a big festival, which we did, and then sell the film to somebody who would distribute it. And that was not feasible for this film. And we had to make lemonade out of lemons and kind of do a lot of it ourselves. And then also we did make some deals, but we sold the film off in pieces for the pieces that we did sell, as opposed to selling it all together. So it was really messy and it was not as lucrative as historically it should have been to sell a film like this. But the point is because I hung on to the rights and I got to nitpick what each deal, and I myself kept the theatrical and non theatrical rights. So I put the film in theaters across the country. I took the film to film festivals, to community centers, libraries, et cetera, and I could control the quality and I could make sure that everything was to my liking. And I was the boss in this situation, which usually you sell a film and then you're at the mercy of the streamer or whoever is the buyer.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:01:13]:

I just want to say, when you say streamer, it took me a minute to catch on. You mean like streaming services for our listeners who may not know the lingo. I was like, streamers and I'm like, oh, streaming services. That's what you mean to say. That what's interesting to me, though, is that it's very in multiple ways, like you said, it's very similar to the Horn and Hard art story. Like, you hanging on to the integrity of what you put out there in the way that they hung on to the integrity of what they created. And that so leads me to another question I wanted to ask you, which is there's so many business lessons and reminders in your documentary and in how you tell the story and in the story of Horn and Hard Art. I'm curious, this is kind of one piece, but what else you take away from your own storytelling? What have you learned and how have you put that into your business and into your work and what you put out into the world?

Lisa Hurwitz [01:02:09]:

Something that I have been thinking a lot about lately is how I want to continue making films. This definitely was a harder way to have a finished film and then try to sell it because that's really going against the current model of getting a production deal. But I would do it again. I learned that I really do value my independence and my freedom. I'd say to be outside of the system and inside of the system. I think they're really looking at algorithms to make their

decisions and they're just trying to make stuff that's really super broad. And I love doing it my way. Of course, that's not always possible, but I really want to push back on something I've really learned is just how much I value that independence. And I've decided that I do want to push back on this kind of system that's being pushed onto me as a filmmaker now. And I want to try to keep being independent. And I know that it's not everybody's kind of working with production deals right now and the streamers are coming in on their films at the beginning. But I appreciate also that I have skin in the game and that if the film is successful, that I'm going to be successful and that I can do things at my pace, like with kind of with the streamers. People are having to make films really quickly and every year you got to have a new one. And I like my place. I just like being able to enjoy the process, to be able to be really mindful about things and not rush them, just letting the magic happen. For sure, if this had been a production of another company, they would have gotten the film out way faster than I did. I sat on it during COVID instead of release it online, I toured it all around the country. I've done over 120 Q and A's to date with this film. And I believe in just the personal touch. I think that it makes this film so much more meaningful for people to have conversations about it. And I think that there's important conversations to be had. So I always when I have the opportunity to do a screening that involves a conversation, I do it. And I also think that it's an investment in the film's future. I think that the word of mouth is so valuable. I love having people tell other people about the film and hopefully the film will have I mean, I know the film has legs because it's been two years and it's still going, but maybe it can be evergreen and it can be a film that will be referenced in the years to come. And then also, it's my first film, so it's an investment in my future, too. It's my baby, but it's my career. And all the positive talk about the movie, it hopefully will go on to be a part of my life for many years to come. I think of it really holistically for me. There's just no other way. I'm so glad that I released the film in this really grassroots, personal way and I really do believe every single person is important. And I just came from Vermont, where I toured the film this weekend around the state. And these were smaller community screenings that ranged from like 30 people to 85 people. And those were really good turnouts for really small towns that are really kind of off the beaten path. And the organizers, the film festival that organize the tour, they asked me like, well, was this worth it for you? And for me, it's like absolutely every single person counts. And I'm just really grateful that I have a film that really touches people and it is like medicine. You mentioned that you've watched the film several times, that it was cathartic for you. This was so much more than just a restaurant. So I'm really happy that we were able to tell this story because it's not simple. It's a lot that we packed in there and I don't know how many other films in my career are going to be as special as this one, but I really lucked out.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:07:52]:

You came out of the gate with a really special one right away. Well done. It was so beautiful listening to you because I was just thinking about how many lessons and pieces of wisdom the film talks about from the Horn and Hard Art story that you completely follow in how you went about creating your film company and getting this film out there and what you look to, to the future. And I think an interesting thing to me and that is really a feminine perspective is like you said, this fostering of relationships. And to me that seems like a key to resilience as film industry

changes. That may have been something when I think about and we haven't talked about this, but sort of the downfall of the automats and the ending of Horn and Hard Art, I feel like as the generations changed in leadership and as culture changed, there wasn't the ability to flex with that. And like, what you're talking about is fostering the relationships almost supersedes whatever might be. However the film industry changes, when there's still connection, there's still interest, there's still relationships, that is a way to get through. And I think that's how Horn and Hardart got through the Depression and world wars and ups and downs until they got so big that they couldn't do that anymore in the same way. And to me, that in the face of a major culture shift and you talk about this in the film, in food culture, where women were no longer working in the city, people weren't eating dinner in the city where they worked, they were going home. As suburbia happened, as all kinds of things changed in culture, all that was in Third face, and yet they were, like, on a path and didn't have the ability to pivot with that change. And the way you're talking about, the way you're approaching your business and your film to me and fostering relationships. And I think a feminine perspective has this way of being able to pivot and change and be resilient as culture changes because intending relationships, you're aware of what people want, how culture has changed desire, how culture has changed habits. And we can flex with that because we're listening in conversation with people.

Lisa Hurwitz [01:10:27]:

Absolutely couldn't have put it better myself.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:10:32]:

That's an interesting thing. And it was heartbreaking, of course, to see the part of the story about why Horn and Hardart kind of fell into oblivion and failed as culture changed and things like that. And they were kind of very focused on a path of growth, assuming culture was going to be the way it was and everything changed and they couldn't pivot with it in the same way. And I mean, it is heartbreaking and that's part of the nature and cyclical nature of life, I would say, as well, is not everything can adapt. Some things can and some things can't. So I have. Two last questions for you. The first is, and this is something I ask all my guests is I'd love to know if there's a woman who really is an inspiration or motivation or guide that you turn to or someone who's been an inspiration in your life.

Lisa Hurwitz [01:11:32]:

Well, this is not necessarily food related, but it's okay.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:11:36]:

It doesn't have to be.

Lisa Hurwitz [01:11:40]:

I love Elizabeth Warren, and I hope we have a female president sooner rather than later. And I'm really excited about seeing our society move to be a little more socialistic and a little bit more kind. I mean, I it's it's part of the the theme of the automat that, you know, we can both make we can make money and we can also do good by everybody else. I'm sorry.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:12:30]:

That's beautiful. I love that we can make money and do got good. I think that's super inspiring. And I appreciate you saying that you see Elizabeth Warren as a leader and someone who inspires you about that possibility.

Lisa Hurwitz [01:12:47]:

Yeah, a little like a bit of a more humane capitalism, for sure.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:12:55]:

And so from that, is there anything we didn't talk about that you really want to say or want our listeners to hear about? Anything you want to say something more about that we did talk about? What would you like our listeners to walk away from listening to this podcast, taking with them?

Lisa Hurwitz [01:13:11]:

What did we not cover?

Missy Singer DuMars [01:13:13]:

Oh, we talked about so many things. I don't even know.

Lisa Hurwitz [01:13:17]:

I think it's so special how you love the movie. And then you approached me about being on the show. I'd say to all your listeners for what the automat represented to you personally. They have their own automat, which is something that is a meaningful, special memory of their own. And it's incredible for me to see the reaction of people like you who they get to relive this thing of their past and they find so much joy in it, and they discover so much that they start to see this thing they thought they knew in a different way. So I think I would just encourage your listeners, maybe think a little bit about what is your automat to you listening at home and how might you be able to dig a little deeper and see it in a new light, learn something about it you didn't know, connect with it on a deeper level. It's just amazing how much deeper we can go with something than we realize and just what kind of amazing stuff there is to be found when we look.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:14:51]:

Well, that's a beautiful note to end on. Thank you so much. I mean, curiosity. Anyone who's listened knows curiosity is top most value of mine. Curiosity and nourishment. And we got to talk about both food and curiosity. And that's really the heart of women in food, is to spark everyone's curiosity. So if it's your favorite dish or even if it's about the automat, and you want to ask older family members or people in your life if they know what the automat is or remember it. I definitely recommend following your curiosity and watching the film, whether or not you know anything about the automat beyond this podcast episode, because it is a fun film, it's a beautiful storytelling. There are so many lessons and inspiration for life, for treating other people, for whatever kind of business you may or may not be in. Obviously I'm very excited about it because I talk about it and my friends and family can tell you I've talked about it. I've told everyone I know, like, you have to watch this movie, you have to watch this movie. Every time I've watched it, I've heard it differently and learned more. And I love something that makes me think, that makes me look at my life, my work, the world around me a little differently. So the link to how to watch the film will be in the show notes. I said it at the beginning of our conversation that you can watch it streaming on HBO Max, you can rent it on Amazon and other streaming apps or keep an eye on their website, follow Lisa on social media. And you'll know, where there's film festivals where it's being shown, I know it's still being shown around.

Lisa Hurwitz [01:16:37]:

Like she said, we do have lots of in person screenings coming up, many of which I will be at.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:16:44]:

Yes. So that is a fun way. So, Lisa, thank you so much for braving the Women in Food. I know you felt like a little bit of an outsider stop it, guest. But I think it's important, like you and I are in a similar path, or at least with the automat, of sharing stories and giving voice to wisdom and stories of others in food and food world. And I think besides the delight and joy and fun of the automats, there's a lot of really great wisdom for anyone creating something, having a business, even in our everyday decision making around, following our values and integrity and being kind to one another and welcoming to all people and so many things. So thank you to all our listeners. I hope you enjoyed this episode of Women in Food and got a bit of inspiration for your next meal. I think many of you will be making mac and cheese in the near future. As a last request, if you could go over to itunes or whatever app you're using to listen and give us a rating and review. It's a simple act that helps us be seen and heard by more people. So, once again, thank you for accompanying me on this delicious adventure. Join me around the table for our next episode and get ready to eat. Our channel and.