

# Food for Thought

People · Products · Purpose

February 2024

“You can’t teach people anything. You can only draw out what is already in them.”

— George Washington Carver

## Meet local celebrity chef Nate Watts



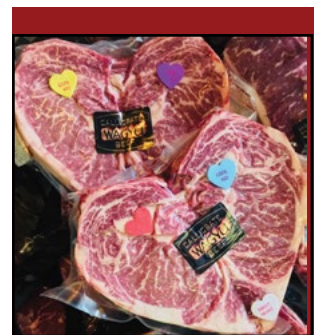
**YOU’VE DEVELOPED QUITE A FOLLOWING WITH YOUR RFD COOKING VIDEOS ON FACEBOOK. TELL US ABOUT IT.**

Everybody wants to be able to cook good food, they just want somebody to make it easy for them to understand. Food TV has created this monster where everybody wants to cook like they see on the screen, but nobody understands how to do it, because most people haven’t learned the basics. For example, cutting up a chicken. That’s something I hadn’t ever done before I went to culinary school. So it goes back to learning the basics and how to put it all together and then you start learning to cook instinctually rather than following a recipe or video.

**WHAT’S YOUR BACKGROUND?** I was in the Army for 21 years. I did a lot of instruction on how to do things, and I always felt like I became better at something by teaching other people. After I retired from the Army, I finished my undergrad at UCCS. Graduated right in the middle of 2020. The job market was not exactly exciting at that time. I still had some GI Bill money left over and started looking around for things to do with it. I almost jumped back into a master’s program in geology, which is what my undergrad degree was in, but a friend of mine posted that she had started culinary school. And I thought, hey, what about that? I found out that Pikes Peak Community College had a two-year culinary program. So that’s what I did. I graduated just a few months ago. I came to Ranch Foods Direct to do my internship, which is a capstone exercise to finish out my degree.

**WHY RANCH FOODS?** I wanted to learn how to process meat better. And I’ve learned so much. For the internship I had to track everything I was doing for three months. I must have processed two or three tons worth of beef during that time. Now I’m shooting videos, but I’m also making all the beef bone broth, the tallow, the lard, and the turkey and chicken stock. I’m enjoying it.

**FAVORITE CUT?** Right now I’m in love with the flat iron. It’s so tender and so easy to cook. You can cook it in 15 minutes and have enough meat for probably four people. It’s only about an inch thick. It has shorter muscle fibers and more marbling than you see in some of the other cuts.



*This month look for beautiful sweetheart steaks hand-cut by RFD’s talented in-store butchers.*

# A book, a mission and a historical account worth preserving



Customer  
Spotlight

*Sandra Knauf is a long-time Ranch Foods Direct customer, a west-side urban homesteader and publisher of the Greenwoman Substack blog. She was first featured in this newsletter back in May 2019 following publication of her rollickingly fun memoir, Please Don't P\*ss on the Petunias. Since then she has taken on a monumental project: the reprinting of a special 80th anniversary edition of George Washington Carver: An American Biography, written by little known journalist Rackham Holt. Local artist Mike Beenenga of Artistic Gold Creative designed the new cover.*

## TELL US THE STORY BEHIND THE BOOK:

About 25 years ago I fell in love with an old biography of George Washington Carver that had been out-of-print since 1963. It was published in 1942 by Doubleday and was written by a woman, Margaret Saunders Holt, under the pen-name Rackham Holt. I thought I had bought a dry book about science and agriculture, but it was such delightful, fun reading (my sister described it as cinematic and lively) that I made it my mission to get the book republished. I was astonished at what I didn't know about this scientist and teacher. One of the areas that fascinated me was that Carver was teaching organic farming, soil preservation and rejuvenation, composting, eating wild foods and so on — basically everything that we should be doing today. He taught these practices for 47 years at Tuskegee, Alabama, beginning in the late 1890s.

## WHY DID THE BOOK GO OUT OF PRINT?

The story of the author, Margaret Saunders Holt, what little I have been able to find out, is pretty tragic. She was born in Denver and raised in Chicago. She was a widow at a young age — her husband, NYC publisher Guy Holt, contracted amebic dysentary at the 1933 World's Fair and died of a heart attack the next year. (I did not know this about the '33 World's Fair, but faulty plumbing at a Chicago hotel polluted the hotel's drinking water supply resulting in 1,700 people ill and 98 deaths.) So Holt became a single mother to her daughter and began to ghost write memoirs. Money was tight, as this was during the Great Depression. She had a very tragic life after the Carver biography was published in 1942. She lost her daughter, exactly what happened I haven't been able to find out, and she battled alcoholism. But in the case of George Washington Carver,

she doggedly pursued the story, against his wishes at first, going to Tuskegee and accompanying him on his 4 a.m. walks until he gradually softened and finally relented. And ultimately it was the only biography he ever endorsed. I like telling her story as well as his, because this was her great work and she's kind of been forgotten. It took 20 years to track down a distant relative, her great-nephew, to obtain the rights.

**WHAT IS YOUR MAIN TAKEAWAY FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER'S INCREDIBLE LIFE?** I'd love to see us return to a back-to-nature education boom. Carver was a part of that in the early 1900s, the push to have nature study in schools. It's happening in a few areas, again, but I would love to see all children educated on how to do the things that many kids used to grow up learning how to do — gardening, raising small livestock, carpentry, sewing, preserving food, foraging, etc. As Carver would say, it's just about being in tune with nature. I do feel hopeful about the future. The internet is helping expose people to more engaged ways of living and the pandemic woke us up to how broken our food and educational systems really are.

**ANY NEW FAVORITES YOU'VE TRIED RECENTLY AT RFD?** At the end of last year, my daughter and I split a pig pool. So we're enjoying that. I've also made the shrub drinks using the living vinegars from Urban Farmhouse Co.

## Carver's life one of humble brilliance

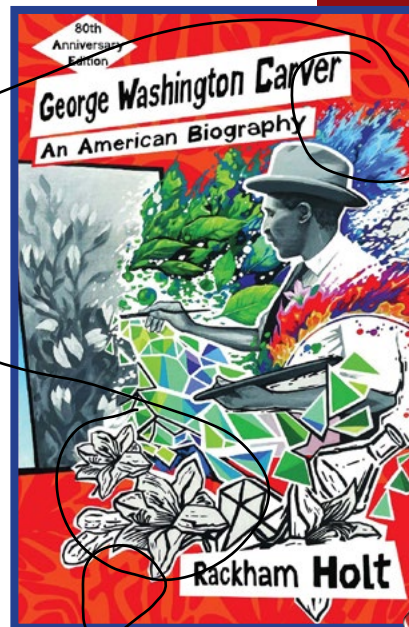
George Washington Carver's remarkable life seemed to court adversity at every turn. But Carver, who was born a slave, also seemed blessed with almost limitless reserves of optimism, fortitude and equanimity. Despite being subjected to racism throughout his life, he refused to focus on personal injustice. "He was a thinker, not a fighter — a laboratory scientist, not a sociologist," according to Rackham Holt's account.

As a sickly child on an impoverished farm in rural Missouri, he lost his mother at a young age. As a young man in search of opportunity, he found his way to Western Kansas, where he attempted to "prove up" a homesteading claim. It's perhaps telling that America's most gifted agriculturalist — sought out for his genius by such famous figures as Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, and Mahatma Gandhi — could not make enough farming in hardscrabble Ness County to cover the payments.

His unquenchable thirst for education, however, along with curiosity, kindness and obvious artistic talent eventually led to his becoming the first black student to attend the esteemed College of Agriculture at Iowa State University and the first black American to earn a master's in the subject. From there, he was recruited to join the country's innovative and iconic experiment in post-reconstruction education, the Tuskegee Institute, which was forged from worn-out Alabama cotton land with almost superhuman tenacity by Booker T. Washington.

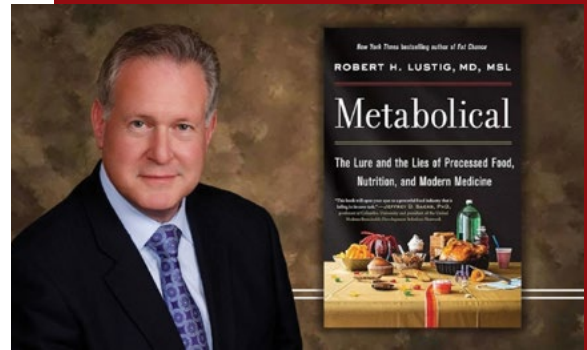
Publisher Sandra Knauf commissioned local artist Mike Beenenga, of Artistic Gold Creative Concepts, to design a modern cover for her recently republished George Washington Carver biography. The result is a striking art piece filled with rich symbolic references:

- Carver was the only chemist of the modern era who could figure out how to recreate the striking Egyptian blue found in ancient tombs.
- He was legendary for his plant breeding prowess. One of his lifelong favorites was the amaryllis bulb.
- Carver was famous for promoting diversification through peanuts but also for refusing monetary payment. The Tom Huston Peanut Co finally convinced him to accept a diamond to add to his geological collection.
- The cross tucked into the background tapestry represents Carver's quiet devotion to his faith.



**WHERE TO BUY THE BOOK:** Order from Amazon or ask your favorite bookstore to have it specially ordered.

## Check this out



The Pikes Peak Library District is hosting a virtual visiting author talk with Robert Lustig, author of Metabolical: The Lure and the Lies of Processed Food, Nutrition and Modern Medicine at 12 noon on Tuesday, January 30. The talk will be recorded and posted for future viewing at LibraryC.org. Lustig is also the author of Fat Chance: Beating the Odds Against Sugar, Processed Food, Obesity and Disease.

Lustig majored in nutritional biochemistry at MIT before going to medical school. There he was taught the mantra "calories in, calories out," which he contends has "set medicine back fifty years, maybe more." Instead, the quality of calories counts. He calls the low-fat diet "a dismal failure." Instead of avoiding fat or salt, look out for radically altered grains or fruits devoid of natural fiber. He takes issue with author Michael Pollan's famous quip: "Eat food, not too much, mostly plants," by pointing out that Coke, French fries and Doritos are mostly plants. Instead **eat real food** — "Protect the liver, feed the gut. Look for foods that satisfy both."

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# Stephanie Lyman, baker behind Steffi's Confections



**YOU WERE ABLE TO TRAVEL TO PARIS IN LATE 2023. WHAT INSPIRATION OR IDEAS DID YOU TAKE FROM THAT TRIP?** As we speak, I'm making dessert crepes for Friday steak night at Colorado Coffee Merchants. Nutella crepes with strawberries and bananas. (I prepare the desserts for them every week. It's a fun creative outlet for me.) What I liked about everything we had over in France, whether it was just a simple cut of fish or a croissant, it was always perfectly prepared. There's a focus on quality and simplicity and making things beautiful.

## **WHAT ARE YOU MAKING FOR VALENTINE'S DAY**

**THIS YEAR?** Sea salt and vanilla bean caramels dipped in dark chocolate. They are so beautiful and so delicious.

Real butter, real cream, real vanilla bean. And year-round we always have the individual caramels made with locally raised lavender and Lockhart Honey. I'll also be doing cocoa bombs, made from scratch using my own custom chocolate mix, and cute heart-shaped sugar cookies.



**FAVORITE TREAT TO MAKE?** Homemade cherry cordials. I use Luxardo Maraschino liqueur and Duellers Dark agave from local Black Hat Distilleries to make the syrup, along with a few spices, and then soak dark sweet cherries in it for a couple of months before dipping them in chocolate.

**FAVORITE RFD PRODUCTS?** The burgers from the deli case are always awesome. And the beef bacon. We actually prefer it to the pork. It's so good.

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