

DISCOVERING DAILY DETAILS

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By

Lisa M. Jones

Director: Matt Liddle

Professor of Printmaking

Committee Members: Cathy Griffin, Photography and
Seth McCormick, Art History

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This work is dedicated to M.B.

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ABSTRACT

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Lisa M. Jones, M.F.A.

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Director: Matt Liddle

This thesis exhibition explores how daily rituals, over time, make up the rhythm of life. My artistic process is rooted in self-observation while engaging in my daily rituals. This exploration began by using photography to focus on my daily rituals concerning the food I eat. This led to the development of repetitive mark-making, and ultimately to my exploration of daily rituals in general, and the visual rhythms they create.

My thesis work consists of four pieces including drawing, photography, writing, and artist books. The pieces expose subtle variations found within the mass-repetition of a similar unit. These variations develop patterns which are formed by the accumulation of information over time. Time plays an important role in my discovery: while I can control the creation of each small part, over time, the greater whole reveals its own unique visual rhythm.

CHAPTER 1

Reflecting on what I can eat, I began to photograph my meals which led to my project of photographing every meal that I ate for the year of 2010. While working on this project, I became increasingly aware of the moment right before I ate my meal- a moment of pause and deliberate awareness. It was in this moment that I recognized my rituals involved in preparing and eating each meal, but also my newly developing ritual of photographing each meal.

Four years ago, my relationship to food changed when I discovered I cannot eat gluten. Because of this, I developed a hyper-awareness about the food I eat, but by maintaining strict vigilance over the ingredients, and method of preparation for every meal, I have learned to regain and maintain my health. Eating only foods that are gluten-free can be limiting, but I have found ways to keep my diet interesting and enjoyable.

In photographing my meals, I compiled the photographs in a horizontal linear format. Much of my previous work has also been resolved in this format as I am drawn to it visually, but also conceptually- as a continual line connecting one event to another and as a reflection of time's role in continual events. The meals that I ate over the course of one year are represented by small (1"x1") photographic images, and are assembled side-by-side in chronological order. This produced a long narrow image of over 1000 small photographs which I printed on 13 oz. smooth vinyl. Compiled in this way, I emphasized the repetition

and accumulation of my meals over time, and produced an image that serves as a document or a recorded history of my meals (fig. 1).



Figure 1. *Every Day, Every Meal* Lisa M. Jones, 2011
Digital Inkjet Print on 13 oz. Vinyl, Hand-written Text and Photographic
Images on Matte Paper

Photographing my meals grew into a ritual of its own. When I became the observer of this ritual, I became the controller of my artistic process. What began as a project of photographing my meals grew into a project of documenting and recording the rhythms and patterns in my daily routine. My photographic sources provided a quick visual record of place and memory for that specific meal.

I began to write my thoughts, memories and associations with the images directly on my photographs, printed on 8.5" x 11" matte paper. In writing on each photograph, my goal was to be honest and to use my own voice. The content of my writing focuses on specific memories or stories I associate with the meal in each photograph. I wrote freely and let the lighter space and shapes of the photograph dictate how the text would wrap around the image. I made mistakes in spelling or word choices, and allowed myself to draw a line through these mistakes and continue, as if I was writing an entry in my diary (fig. 2).



Figure 2. *Every Day, Every Meal* Lisa M. Jones, 2011
Detail

Objects are used to imbue photographs with meaning and they bring connotative meaning to the viewer, but this meaning can be enhanced or changed when text is added to the image. Roland Barthes states: “We privilege text over image and use that text to inform our understanding of the image -so the image is always constrained by the text” (Barthes 23).

In viewing my photographs, the images reveal the food choices I made which are based on my gluten-free needs and my cooking abilities and interests. These images attempted to give an honest account about what I ate over the course of a year. The addition of my text directly written onto the photograph’s surface, however, served to clarify or expose truths that the image couldn’t communicate independently. The images carry connotations of their own which exist because of choices made about what is real. These choices were made in my editing and selecting the photographs, as well as by the viewer’s understanding of the objects and individual associations with what objects represent.

For example, one photograph represents an image of two slices of gluten-free pizza on a “Fiesta Ware” brand plate, placed on a dark wooden table. There is a salad of baby greens in a wooden salad bowl sitting on this plate, and the lighting is warm. The image alone is representing a healthy looking meal. The text written on top states “I took this photograph and then went back to the kitchen to put a third piece of pizza on my plate.” Initially I didn’t put the third piece in the photograph because I didn’t want to appear to have a plate loaded with “too much” food. The text exposed the honesty in what I ate and reveals my

control over what I wanted people to think about the meal, and what I finally admit about my food choices and consumption.

Other photographs in *Every Day, Every Meal* contain writing inspired by memories from my childhood, or the moment when I ate that specific meal (figs. 3, 4). In looking at a photograph of a plastic bowl containing cereal, milk, and bananas, I was reminded of the specific Saturday morning when I ate that meal and how the TV was on at that moment. This image immediately provoked memories of Saturday mornings in my childhood, and how I attended choir school and therefore never got to watch Saturday morning cartoons. As much as I did enjoy and learn a lot in choir school, I didn't like this part of my childhood, because I wanted to be like the other kids. As an adult watching TV on a Saturday morning while eating my breakfast, I am rejecting this routine or value my parents placed on me as a child, and this is reflected in my writing.

My written texts connect to each other and provide a cohesive and honest dialogue about my life's experiences throughout the piece. In adding them I am connecting my meals, and the ritual of eating my daily meals, to daily events of my life in general: interactions with friends, conversations with my husband, running errands, memories of childhood and travels, etc. My writing exposes tiny and often overlooked details in my process and in my meals. It reveals and documents the details of my personal relationship to food, and the details surrounding my food and my daily experiences.



Figure 3. *Every Day, Every Meal* Lisa M. Jones, 2011
Detail



Figure 4. *Every Day, Every Meal* Lisa M. Jones, 2011
Detail

American photographer and writer, Jim Goldberg, photographs subcultures, creates photo-collages and includes text with his photographs, often written by his subjects. Similarly to my work, text is freely written on his photographs with an honest and human quality in content. In his series *Rich and Poor* (1985), he photographs people in their homes along with handwritten comments by them about their lives. The handwriting of one photograph from this specific series reads: "I keep thinking where we went wrong. We have no one to talk to now, however, I will not allow this loneliness to destroy me— I STILL HAVE MY DREAMS. I would like an elegant home, a loving husband and the wealth I am used to. Countess Vivianna de Bronville" (Goldberg). Although it is the person photographed and not Goldberg himself writing on the photographs, the empathy and the uniqueness of the subjects emerge in Goldberg's work through the combination of their writing and his photography. The text informs our understanding of the photograph in a way the image alone, could not.

When discussing the sequential and grid-like format of displaying my photographs, I consider the work *Autobiography* (Sol LeWitt), a black and white photographic catalogue of every object in the artist's living and working space in New York City. It begins with a general description of LeWitt's work space, tools, cabinets for storage, furniture, books, appliances, clocks, records and tapes, pieces of art and family photographs. The book moves sequentially from the general to the specific, building up a personal and revealing account of the artist and his involvements. In this work, each of the nine photographs on every page is arranged in a grid format.

Similarly, I have arranged each of my photographs, chronologically and in a grid format in *Every Day, Every Meal*. Printed on vinyl, the grid is tight and holds all of my meals, creating an image measuring 13 feet. My photographs of meals with hand-written text surround the long narrow vinyl image. These are placed above and below while arranged in a loose, unmeasured grid-like format. Also, as in *Autobiography*, my images build upon each other to reveal their story, and they are the same in size with no image more important than another.

In *Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner* (figs. 5, 6, 7), a series of three small books, I compiled selected photographs of my meals to show an organized account of what I eat in one week. Each book is organized by its meal (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) with photographs presented in a “stiff leaf” binding. The codex, a versatile book format, is a complex organization of material and conceptual elements. “A book is an entity, to be reckoned with in its entirety- the most successful books are those which account for the interrelations of conceptual and formal elements, thematic and material concerns” (Drucker 75).

The title of each book suggests the mundane repetitive nature of eating three meals a day. The viewer is able to hold the book in one hand which intimately connects the viewer to each meal, one by one, as the pages turn (fig. 8). The act of turning each page represents the motion of repetition as it acknowledges the passing of time. The process of holding and turning the pages engages the hands of the viewer, and connects the viewer to the act of, and time involved with eating and preparing a meal.



Figure 5. *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner* Lisa M. Jones 2011
Photographs and Book Board



Figure 6 *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner* Lisa M. Jones 2011
Photographs and Book Board



Figure 7. *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner* Lisa M. Jones 2011
Photographs and Book Board



Figure 8. *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner* Lisa M. Jones 2011
Photographs and Book Board
Detail

A book is a tool of communication which can be used to educate or impart information. Although I am an artist with creative tendencies, I also possess a scientific way of thinking and explaining information. This is reflected in my creative process which involves methods of exploring, documenting and identifying information. In this way, I am influenced by Kenneth Leslie's books which use these methods to create his books, often in a circular format, with a sequential narrative. In his artist's book *Space and Time*, his photographs document the changes over space and time as his accompanying text states: "From one place in the garden I measured the perimeter of my world and I marked off 52 equally spaced points. Then I shot a photo every week facing each successive point. At the end of one year I'd be back to where I had begun. In so far as Magellan had already travelled around the world, I sat in one spot and let the world travel around me. Two ways to discover the world is round" (Leslie).

Over time, Leslie completed a circle of movement and his photographs reflected the changes and the different views of his yard from each perspective. The photographs capture the changes in light, seasons as well as details such as where a car is parked, or his children's outside activities. His text is hand written above the photographs. Below the photographs are his hand-written numbers documenting the date and changing perspectives of each photograph. Through documentation, Leslie connects a personal narrative of life events to a greater narrative of the world at large.

In *Every Day Every Meal*, I also use documentation to connect my personal narrative to a greater narrative. On the vinyl piece, I arranged my photographs chronologically and linearly to represent a time-line. I then wrote directly on the vinyl's surface, using a pen to mark numbers and letters along the edges of the image so they would correspond to each photograph. This system can be read in the same way we read maps to locate a specific point. By doing this, I marked the specific time and place of each meal within the context of the longer image, or within the history of meals. This brings the viewer's attention to the details surrounding each meal as they could view the larger images and then note the corresponding numbering code to place it within the context of the history of meals.

CHAPTER 2

Half way through my project of using photography to record my meals, I began to seek new ways to visualize my ideas. I returned to a basic form of creating: drawing. Every morning, I made this my very first activity of the day. I didn't allow myself time to think before I drew, I just put the pen to paper and created what came honestly and naturally. Prior to creating these drawings, I had always maintained some control in my art by formulating goals and answers before creating the work as a means to ensure an answer when asked to defend or explain my art. However, this hindered my creative freedom and ability to follow artistic exploration honestly and naturally, and it prevented me from trusting the creative process to guide me to answers. So with these new drawings, I let go of my old habits of control, and for the first time I began to draw with no intentional plan other than to explore, learn and create.

Over the weeks, I noticed patterns developing in my daily drawings. My shapes and lines began to repeat and form a pattern which consisted of: a circle inside a square. I related the circle to a plate of food, or the meal itself, and the square to the frame of the photograph, or the moment of awareness before I eat each meal. Beginning on the left side of the paper, I drew my pen across the page to the right. As the shapes formed, one after another without lifting my pen, the drawing became a continuous line of "cells". These cells started to stack-up

against each other and on top of each other, across the length of my paper. For months, I could only draw this pattern. It quickly filled many pages of paper and soon I needed larger paper so I wouldn't run out of space so quickly.

I began to view the repeating shape, (the cell) as not only representing my meals but also, a unit of experience unrelated to food. I can relate the rhythms and repetitive qualities of this unit, not only to my patterns in eating and consumption, but to my routines of lap swimming, daily drives from Asheville to Cullowhee, and to my other mundane routines and life's repetitive activities. Eventually, a language developed through my creation of repetitive mark-making and as a result of my daily routine. In the act of creating and drawing this language, I began to draw out (pun intended) a sense of calm, which provided a sustaining quality to my day. Like eating, I need to do it every day. It sustains and re-energizes me; it keeps me healthy.

I began drawing on mulberry paper measuring 3 feet in height and 30 feet in length. Drawing on a long roll of paper, I gave myself a guide by setting parameters for the edges of the paper so that they would frame in the drawing. Every time that I reached the edge of this guide, the line of cells looped back the other direction, following the path of the previously drawn line. Over the month of January 2011, I filled this paper by drawing a continual line of my repetitive marks in the same process as described earlier. This resulted in the piece entitled *January* (fig. 9).



Figure 9. *January* Lisa M. Jones 2011
Archival Pigment Ink on Mulberry Paper (3' x 30')

I worked on *January* each morning while sitting at a desk with 2 feet of the drawing exposed at any one time. The rest of the drawing was rolled away so I could not view it in its entirety until it was completed. The shapes started to show

subtle changes: the circles would be long and fill the whole space of the squares, or the squares would be rounded and rectangular, with small closed circles in the center. This continual line changed in speed, thickness, and direction. As these individual shapes changed, the larger shape started to show its own changing rhythms (fig. 10). I learned through this process that I was controlling the mark-making as I drew the line's path across the page, but the marks developed into patterns which I could not control. The larger drawing started to develop its own movement, shapes, gaps, waves and rhythms.



Figure 10 *January* Lisa M. Jones 2011
Detail

Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes (LeWitt 1974), is composed by 122 equal sized white pieces in which LeWitt obsessively explores the different ways to define a single cube. The work is viewed on a platform, too splayed to be taken in at a glance. Each of the fragmented frames are meticulously painted white and sit in regimented but meaningless lines, demonstrating a kind of mad obstinacy (Krauss 54). Rosalind Krauss describes the babble of LeWitt's serial expansion as "having nothing of the mathematician's language. It has the loquaciousness of the speech of children or of the very old, in that its refusal to summarize, to use the single example that would imply the whole, is like those feverish accounts of events composed of a string of almost identical details, connected by 'and'" (Krauss 55).

I draw a connection to *January*, in that a viewer might not find a clear reason for creating such a long and repetitive drawing. In creating it, I was letting myself freely draw, but I was also tapped into a system or method and although it wasn't rooted in logic, my mind was clear as I created this piece. Similarly, *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes* has a system with order, and Krauss points out that there is a method to LeWitt's "madness". She states: "In this piece we find the "system" of compulsion, of the obsessional's unwavering ritual, with its precision, its neatness, its finicky exactitude, covering over an abyss of irrationality. It is in that sense design without reason, design spinning out of control. The obsessional's solutions to problems strike us as mad, not because the solutions are wrong, but because in the setting of the problem itself there is a strange short-circuit in the lines of necessity" (Krauss 56).

To communicate the concept of my daily routine and ritual, I broke *January* into paragraph-like sections. To show organization and structure, I documented the date and time in which I started each “paragraph”. I wrote the numbers corresponding to the date and time in the margin and then, with a drawn line, I connected these numbers to the exact location within the paragraph. This is similar to the use of numbers in *Every Day, Every Meal* as it is a way to organize, categorize and provide a reference for the viewer.

In the act of drawing *January*, I engaged in a meditational-like process where my mind calmed and I let go of my daily thoughts, emotions, moods, activities and interactions. Daily events disappeared into the rhythms of the drawing as the act of drawing overtook me. The resulting patterns and rhythms reflect the nuances of my perceptions, moods, and daily activities. Through this drawing, a language developed over time, serving as an abstracted recorded history of these daily events. Instead of using writing to say something that I know, I was writing as an act of discovery.

For the thesis exhibition, *January* is displayed as a scroll. It rests on a wooden shelf and the edges are rolled to prevent the viewer from seeing the beginning or the end of the piece. The marks represent language to be read and to impart information. I chose this display to emphasize the concept of a continuation of the line, with no beginning and no end.

The scroll is associated with sacred books and religious texts. It can be used for record keeping and in practices of preserving and imparting information. By viewing my drawings as scrolls, I suggest that the information in my work

holds a meaning with greater importance. When I view my drawings as the repetition of my meals, my daily consumption of meals begins to reference a religious act.

Although I am not a religious person, I do consider my daily consumption of meals to be an experience very close to my spiritual self. I consider the mechanisms of eating: putting the food in my mouth, chewing, navigating the textures and flavors of each bite. Every day, several times a day, we eat and drink, put food into our mouths and swallow it, allowing the food to nourish us and give us energy. This simple act of eating is a basic human activity, understood from one culture to another, from one diet to another, one person to another. There are a few daily functions of being alive that we all experience and eating is one of them. I have found a spiritual connection in this simple, repetitive act of eating my meals.

I began to explore units of repetition by cutting up and rearranging earlier drawings. In doing this, I explored patterns and arrangements that led eventually to my artist book, *Accumulation* (fig. 11). Using a photocopier, I repeatedly layered the image of a circle within a square on one sheet of paper. For each new page, I shifted the registration just slightly, moving the image enough to cover a blank space with each image. I repeated this process until the lines accumulated into their own pattern and the marks increased in thickness with each layer.

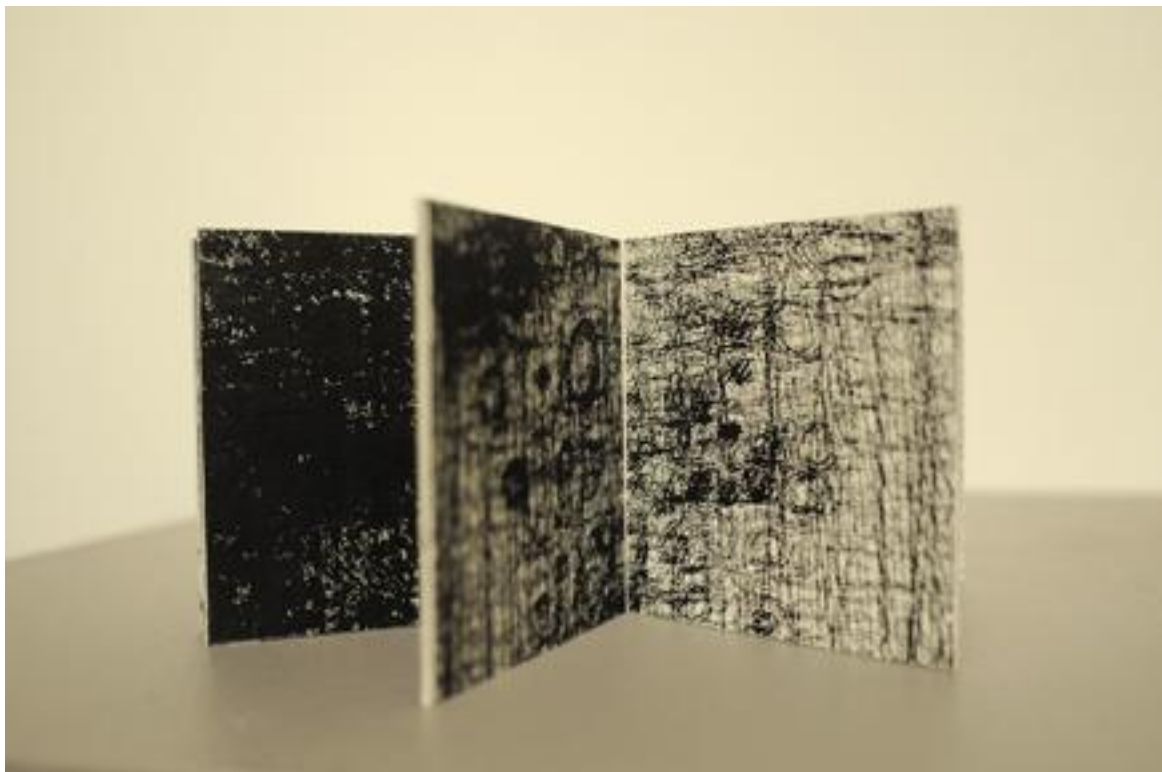


Figure 11. *Accumulation* Lisa M. Jones 2010
Photocopied Drawings on Cardstock

By following this process, I created a different set of marks on the back side of the pages of this book resulting in a book that can be read from either direction (fig. 12). In its image making process, *Accumulation* is in conversation with a book entitled *Gesammelte Werke Band 3*, by Dieter Roth who frequently made works based on the production process. “*Gesammelte Werke Band 3* is composed of a block of lines on a single negative which is printed repeatedly at right angles to increase density on the page. This is a book which becomes the record of its own production as it proceeds since each page is produced through

overprinting the negative on one area of the page. A grid builds up from the intersection of the lines as the pages pass through the press. By shifting the registration slightly, the overprinting moves just enough to put ink onto a bare area of the sheet. Each page has one run more than the page preceding, and the increasing density tightens the grid until almost all white space disappears from it” (Drucker 189).

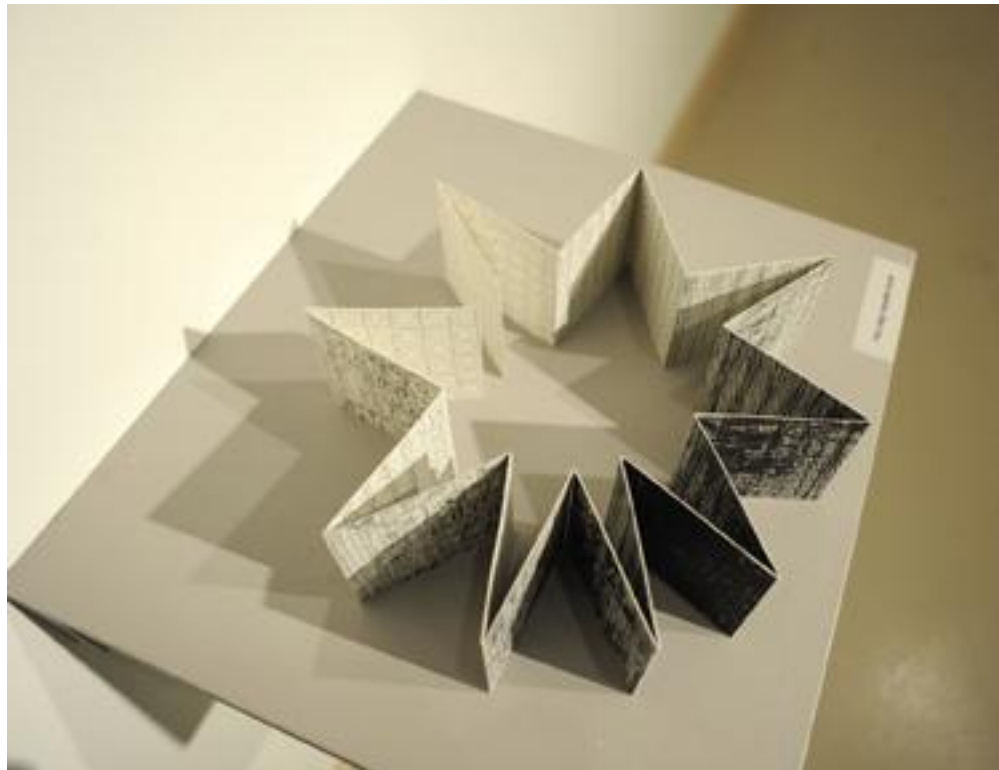


Figure 12. *Accumulation* Lisa M. Jones 2010
Photocopied Drawings on Cardstock

Similarly, *Accumulation* becomes a record of its own production. It was created, however, by using an untraditional printing method: the photocopy machine. I chose this process because it was fast and allowed me to quickly see the printing results and accumulation process. First I layered and photocopied each image onto cardstock and then I cut down the images to the square shape used for the book's pages. The accordion format allows the viewer to read this book in both directions. It also lets the viewer choose to see each image as a page in itself, or as one long narrow image, spanning the length of the book.

Through my artistic process of self-observation in my daily consumption of food, and through my writings, drawings and reflections on this process and the events that surround it, I have created the body of work for this thesis exhibition. The work shows my daily rituals and experiences related to food, but involving many aspects of my life. I exposed how much I control in my artistic process and in my life in general—or more accurately, I expose how much I attempt to control. Life has its own unique patterns and rhythms and my daily activities, interactions, choices and rituals play a part in creating these. Through the process of creating this body of work, I have learned to trust myself, tell it like it is, admit that I ate a third piece of pizza, and let go of some control.

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