

Hyman, alias Prudence, pecks out a column.

Prudence Penny

the lady columnist who really isn't.

For seven months a grizzled portly man has been leading a secret life as a lady cook

By Hyman Goldberg

Since last June I have been obliged to laugh with seeming glee whenever some waggish friend hails me with cries of, "Hello there, Prudence." My friends are convulsed by the thought that perhaps a million or more people must think of me each day as a little old lady, presumably a dear old one, while *they* know that for 39 years I have been a cigar-smoking newspaperman working as a New York police reporter covering fires, murders, gang wars, and from time to time interviewing stars of the stage, screen and TV. Not only my friends but absolute strangers, too, are bewildered by the thought that a grizzled, somewhat portly man with a basso profundo voice should be using a name which is so decidedly feminine, and even prissy, and that such a man should be writing about cooking.

The other day the phone in my office rang, and I picked it up and said, as I generally do, "Goldberg." (That's my name, after all.) There was a second's silence, and then a feminine voice said, "I'm sorry, I must have the wrong extension. I'm calling Prudence Penny." I sighed and said, "This is she." There was another silence and then the voice said, "I don't understand." So I explained that I, Hyman Goldberg, am the author of the cooking column which is printed under the name of Prudence Penny. With disbelief apparent in her voice, my caller hesitantly said she would like to French-fry a three-pound chicken and she wanted to know what kind of batter to use. "Two cups of flour," I told her, "two teaspoons of baking powder, one-half teaspoon salt, two eggs and one-and-one-half cups of milk."

When she had finished writing all this down, she said, with doubt strong in her voice, "You sure? This isn't some kind of joke, is it?" "Madame," I said, "I swear, by Brillat-Savarin, by Escoffier and by Howard Johnson, this is not a joke."

In a restaurant where I took my wife to dinner a few weeks ago I had somewhat the same experience, but this time face to face with a disbeliever. I had just eaten a dish which was new to me. The menu called it "Breast of Capon, Mai Rose." I knew that it had in it May wine, cream and the yolk of an egg as part of the ingredients for the sauce, but I wanted to have the precise measurements so after I paid the check, I asked to see the *maitre d'*. The name of the restaurant is not essential, but it is one of the better and more expensive ones in Manhattan.

"I am Prudence Penny," I announced when he arrived, smiling at me with that peculiar mixture of unctuousness and frosty superiority affected by such people

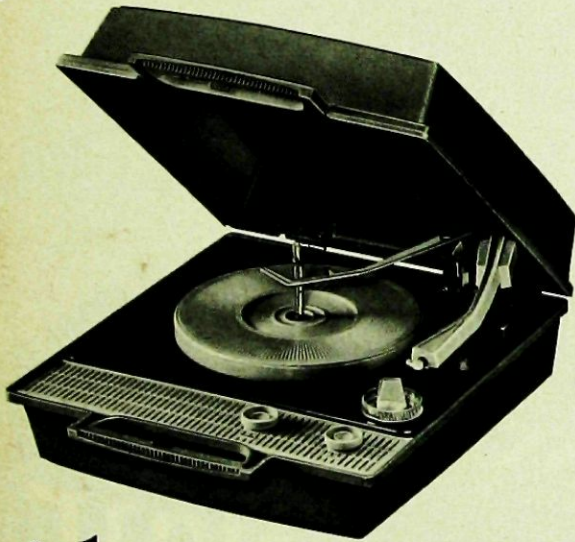


When Goldberg isn't playing Prudence, he spices his life by interviewing actresses, such as Greta Thyssen.



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For 39 years I covered fires, murders

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in swanky joints. Immediately his expression changed. His face mirrored disbelief and, perhaps, dislike. My wife giggled wildly as I explained the situation to the man. It took a long time to convince him, but I finally did, and he got the recipe for me from the chef.

My metamorphosis into Prudence Penny came about when a lady named Vaudine Newell, who had been food-and-cooking editor for the New York *Mirror* for about 25 years, died suddenly one night. A couple of weeks later, upon hearing that the job had not yet been filled, I asked Selig Adler, managing editor of the paper, if I could have it. He laughed. "What the hell," he inquired gently, "do you know about cooking?"

I told him something of my secret life as a cook, and then he said that the editor of the paper, not he, would have to make such a momentous decision. So I sought out Glenn Neville, the editor, and asked him for the job. He laughed.

But when he became convinced that I wasn't joking, he said the publisher of the paper, Charles B. McCabe, would have to pass on my request. Neville told me to write a letter to the publisher telling my qualifications and my philosophy of how a cooking column should be written.

The publisher apparently did not laugh. The day after he received my letter he called me on the phone. "About that Prudence Penny job," he said, "let's have lunch about it." So we had lunch and, after some embarrassed haggling about such sordid topics as money, we reached an agreement and shook hands. So I became Prudence Penny.

That by-line was coined by William Randolph Hearst Sr. more than 50 years ago, and it has been used ever since by the food editors of most of the Hearst

newspapers. At one time there were 30 Prudence Pennys scattered around the country, and now there are still four, including me. (I met one of them, a nice woman who works for the San Francisco *Examiner*, at the Pillsbury Bake-off in Los Angeles a couple of months ago. One evening at a party we went around together asking people, "Who is the real Prudence Penny?")

The pseudonymous life is not new to me. For years I had several articles in the Sunday *Mirror Magazine* each week and, since the paper permitted me to use my name on only one of them, I was forced through the years to invent others. One is Gabriel Prevor. Gabriel is my son's first name and Prevor is a name in my wife's family. I went to high school in Lakewood, N.J., with a boy named Benevy, which I thought at the time had a lot of class, so I adopted Robert Benevy. Reg Ovington was born because I lived at the corner of Ridge Boulevard and Ovington Avenue. The editors once asked me to figure out "a New English-sounding name," so I gave them Amos Coggins. Mannheim Bergold is my name turned around. I also use Jaime Montdor. Jaime, Spanish for James, is pronounced "Hymie," and Montdor, translated from the French into German, means "Goldberg." My favorite, however, was Veigh S. Meer. But someone told my editor that in Yiddish it means "Woe is me!" and he made me quit using it.

I was brought up in restaurants and hotels. My father, a blacksmith, became a restaurateur by accident. He had a one-man smithy in the Bronx when he became ill and had to go to the hospital for an operation. With no money coming in, my mother, with five children to take care of, began cooking meals for men in the neighborhood who were saving money to bring their families to America from

Prudence Penny's recipe for an axe murder.

LIZZIE
BORDEN
SOUP

3 pounds mutton
1 tsp. salt
1 parsnip
1 turnip
3 small onions
3 quarts cold water

Do you have a warm feeling of kinship for our fellow citizens of our sister state to the north of us, Massachusetts? If you do, perhaps you would like to memorialize a day famous in that commonwealth's glorious history by making a dish which has great significance on this day.

Salt mutton, place in kettle and let stand ½ hour to bring out flavor. Pour in cold water, let stand for 1 more hour. Bring to boil, then simmer 3 hours. Blot up excess fat with paper napkin. Add vegetables, simmer for additional hour. Taste for flavor, add seasoning. Refrigerate overnight. On August 4, 1892, in Fall River, Mass., Mrs. Borden served this delicacy to her stepdaughter, Lizzie Borden. Mrs. Borden and her husband were found, later that day, axed unto death. She had served the soup cold, with a side dish of bananas. For breakfast.

ang wars and actresses. Now I cook.



At home in Brooklyn, Prudence adds a hearty slug of sherry to kasha varnitchkas.

Europe. By the time my father came out of the hospital he found, to his astonishment but also great pleasure, that my mother had a flourishing business going. He promptly rented the flat next door, broke down the walls separating them and installed more tables. After a few years he was able to rent a store with a street entrance and opened it as a restaurant seating about 75 people. My two brothers, two sisters and I all helped. I was an expert salad man and chicken-liver chopper at the age of six.

Once he got into the restaurant business, my father set about learning it. Pretty soon he knew everything my mother did about cooking, and blossomed out into a wonderfully daring and inventive cook, developing pleasing and exciting variations on the traditional Russian-Jewish cuisine.

It wasn't until I left my parents' home in the Bronx more than 30 years ago—I'm 55—that I had an opportunity to try my own hand at cooking in the languages other than Russian-Jewish. I had become exposed to other cuisines earlier, when I went to work as a copy boy and then as a police reporter at the age of 16 for the *New York World*, long defunct. (I also worked for the *New York Sun*, defunct;

New York Telegram, defunct; *City News Association*, defunct; the newspaper *PM*, also defunct. And now the *New York Mirror*, defunct. This morbid necrology is giving my new editors on the *Journal-American* pause to think.)

In my letter to Glenn Neville, editor of the *Mirror*, I told how I had become proficient in cooking in French, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish and many other styles, including, of course, American. I mentioned the hundreds of recipes I had collected and invented over the years and submitted several sample cooking columns. The first cooking column of mine that was printed began like this:

"There was this woman in The Bronx who bought two live chickens and kept them on her fire escape to fatten them. Sadly, one of them became indisposed. So she killed the healthy chicken to make soup to bring the one that was ill back to health. Here's her recipe for . . ." And then I gave a recipe for chicken-in-the-pot.

That recipe excited a lady in Montclair, N.J., who wrote:

Dear Miss Penny, Your recipe for Chicken-in-the-Pot came in real handy tonight. My mother-in-law came over to have dinner with my husband and I, and he's always praising his mother's cooking all the time—and I



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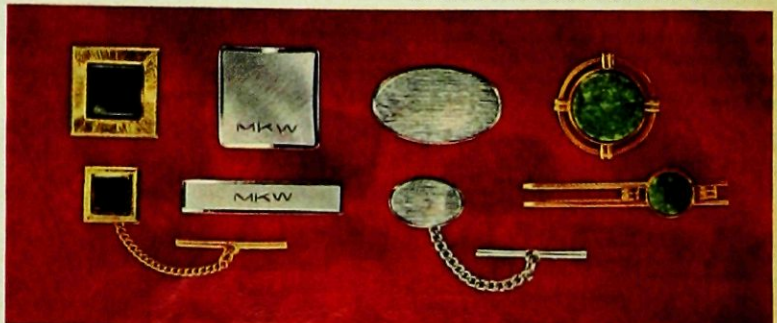
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I was an expert salad man and chicken-liver chopper at the age of six.

PRUDENCE PENNY

followed your recipe and he said in front of his mother that he had never tasted chicken-in-the-pot as delicious as what I had cooked. His mother has been bugging me ever since we have been married and you gave me the nerve to tell her to go fustigate herself.

The readers of the *Mirror*, and now of the *Journal-American*, obviously are a sophisticated lot, for they seem to have taken in stride the rather violent change-over in style from the old Prudence Penny, who wrote with deadly seriousness about food. Some have written to say that it is good to laugh while cooking, which is something I have always believed, for food is a great joy, and anything written about it certainly should not be drearily dull.

In addition to writing the food column for the *Journal-American* seven days a week, I still interview actresses. Both are full-time jobs. But I am cursed—or maybe blessed—by an inability to sleep for more than three or four hours at a stretch. For years I would lie in bed, silently formulating foul oaths and pitying myself. But then it occurred to me—and my doctor confirmed my opinion—that perhaps I did not need as much sleep as others, just as some people require less food or booze than others. So now, instead of worrying about not sleeping, I get up and work at my typewriter or stove.

My wife is a good cook, and she enjoys cooking, but not, I know, as much as I do. For one thing, she *must* cook; so it is naturally more pleasurable for me. Long ago she stopped being amazed at my daring approach to cookery, for she is what is called "a plain cook." This does not mean that she is not beautiful, for she is; it means simply that she cooks uncomplicated, plain dishes like steaks, roasts, stews. What I like to cook, and I do a good deal of it weekends, are things like *piroshki*, which are Russian meat pastries; *olla-podrida*, a Spanish stew with 19 ingredients; *gandinga*, a wonderful Caribbean dish with ham, pork and the liver, kidney and heart of a hog; *tiem shuen yu*, a Chinese sweet-and-sour fish; *kasha varnitshkas*, a noodle dish with buckwheat groats.

When I first became Prudence Penny, I cooked gefüllte fish and made tschav and invited Glenn Neville, the *Mirror's* editor, and John J. O'Connell, then also a Hearst editor, and several other friends to eat my home-cooked lunch. We had the luncheon party at the Peking House Restaurant, a Chinese restaurant near my office, whose bartender, Harry Lee, had once taught me how to cook a yellow pike in gin. The gefüllte fish and tschav, the editors told me, established my right to call myself Prudence Penny.

In case anyone is wondering, I also cook in American. I have in my repertoire such things as Mormon stew; Minnesota baked pike, Yankee bean soup, New England clam chowder; Kalamazoo chowder and New Orleans pecan pie. Every winter I roast several geese, for in my family we think goose fat is much better

for many kinds of cookery than butter or any other fat. I also have invented a stuffing with fried rice, goose and chicken livers, mushrooms and many onions and much garlic.

Many of the recipes in my repertoire are for dishes I learned as a boy in my father's restaurant; others I have got over a period of more than 30 years from newspapers, magazines, wives of friends and from professional chefs; and I have a couple of hundred cookbooks that I have collected. Since I have been Prudence, publishers keep sending me new ones.

The awful thought is always with me that if I write a recipe for something terrible I might make approximately a million or more people unhappy, or much worse, heaven forbid, ill. So I try to test anything that is new to me before I print it. But anyone who has been cooking for a long time—and professional chefs have told me this too—can tell by reading a recipe almost precisely how it will taste. So, occasionally, I will print a recipe for something I have not tried out, but which I know will be good. Confidentially, I often print recipes for foods I do not care for at all but which I know that many of my readers will like. I will try almost anything, and I have eaten, even before I turned into Prudence, some exceedingly strange dishes, to the amazement—and sometimes horror—of my friends.

When I first became Prudence Penny, my wife said that any woman reading the column would know instantly that a man was writing it. If my readers are aware of that, it does not seem to make any difference to them. Most of those who telephone me do not seem at all surprised when I say, "This is she." Neither of my papers saw fit to tell the readers that Prudence Penny is a white-haired, middle-aged, longtime husband and father, but several other publications have asked a lot of questions. One TV man asked if I had ever done any other writing besides newspaper work, and I told him I had written for some magazines ranging from *The New Yorker* to *True Experience*, for which I once wrote this lead, of which I have always been proud. It was ghosted for a girl who had been freed after she shot and killed a man: "I shot and killed my lover, father of my twin illegitimate sons."

As a result of all this notoriety, plans are afoot to syndicate my column to newspapers nationally; 10 publishers of books have called or written asking me to write a cookbook, which I am now doing for one of them, and a few magazines are asking me to write articles for them, some of them not about cooking.

People keep asking my wife how she feels about my being Prudence Penny. She gives them the same answer she has always given people when they told her, confidentially, "for your own good," that they have seen me in a restaurant, bar or nightclub with a beautiful young actress. "Well," replies my wife, who is both philosophical and funny, "he's got to make a living." THE END

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