

# **“AN INTERVIEW WITH THE ULTIMATE REAL MAN CHEF”**

from Real Men Don't Cook Quiche by Scott Redman

The problem was obvious. Having firmly established that Real Men don't eat quiche, millions of people (thousands, anyway) have hungered after a simple answer: Just what do Real Men eat?

What are the foodstuffs that satiate men like Nick Nolte, Chuck Norris, Ned Beatty, Paul Harvey or the Dallas Cowboys – when there's no McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken or Trucker's 76 Pit Stop within excessive speeding distance?

Thirsting after this knowledge, I decided to visit the world's foremost expert in Real Men's cuisine, Rocco (the Knife) Tortellini, current head chef at Joliet State Prison.

As we began the interview, Rocco was putting the finishing touches on a luncheon for 1,200 close friends and former business associates.

Q. What are you serving today?

A. Twelve to 15 for grand theft, conspiracy and extortion, reducible to six weeks for good behavior.

Q. No. I meant for lunch?

A. Oh, It's something called prison stew. The recipe is 1,200 pounds of beef, plus 400 pounds of potatoes and a handful of vegetables. You cut it all up, throw it in a pot and let it simmer until parole.

Q. Does anybody complain about the food?

A. Not if they're smart!

Q. What do you think of the state of Real Men's cuisine today?

A. It makes me sick. In the old days, Real Men ate canned foods – and the can. They ate frozen foods frozen. They ate beef, steak, hamburgers,

cheeseburgers, chili burgers, bacon burgers, pizza burgers and ribs. Anything they could kill with a gun or grill. (Actually, grilling was always the Real Man's favorite way to cook. After a tough day with the DA, it was nice to be on the other side of the table for a change.) But today things are different. You got guys in here who want stuff like Brie. Perrier. Cold pasta salad. Poached salmon in dill. I can understand poaching diamonds. But salmon? Next thing, they'll probably want finger bowls on the tables. If they'd served that stuff in the old days, you woulda had guys breakin' out, not for freedom, but a decent meal.

Q. Why do you think this has happened?

A. I suppose it has something to do with the element crime is attracting today. When I first started, you had thugs, button men, and racketeers. But now you've got guys in here for computer crime. Insurance fraud. Pansy stuff. I think the change started in the early '70's when we had all those guys from Watergate passing through. One of them sent back a piece of meat that was too tough. Now that's a wimp for you. In the old days, a Real Man prided himself on being able to chew through cement.

As Rocco continued preparing lunch, the inmates poured into the dining room. He was correct that times had changed; instead of being filled with "hard guys" like George Raft, Jimmy Cagney or Burt Lancaster (as birdman of Alcatraz), the joint was rotten with cocaine dealers, income tax evaders and Billie Sol Estes-type financial swindlers. It looked more like teatime in the IBM corporate dining room than chowtime at the Rock.

Glancing over the crowd, Rocco shrugged and continued cooking.

Q. Getting back to food, what are the basic eating habits of Real Men?

A. Real Men eat standing up. They eat with their friends. They eat with gusto. They also eat with veterans of foreign wars, cutthroat corporate executives and union officials.

Q. Is there anyone a Real Man won't eat with?

A. Hair stylists, distant cousins, interior decorators and anybody celebrating victory at a backgammon tournament.

Q. What's the main reason Real Men eat?

A. It cuts down on small talk.

Q. What about foreign food? Do Real Men eat guacamole? French food? Mexican food?

A. What do you think?

Q. Well, if you were stuck in a foreign country, there's a chance you might have to ---

A. Wrong. When a Real Man gets hungry overseas, he eats K rations. Or he stops in the cafeteria of the American Embassy and gets a real meal.

Q. Do Real Men always finish what's on their plates?

A. Yeah. But only because they're hungry. Never because children are starving in places like India, Europe, French restaurants or the Republic of Togo.

Q. Do you have any tips for Real Men chefs?

A. Yeah. Always make sure your oven is hot enough to melt a Chevrolet.

Q. What about condiments?

A. I'm Catholic. I don't believe in birth control.

At this point, the interview was suddenly cut short; inside the dining room the inmates were pounding the table for dinner – and it was Rocco's duty to answer their chant of "Granola, Granola, Granola."

Unfortunately, this was to be his last duty as chef.

In Rocco's own words, he'd cooked his own goose by serving one Real Man meal too many – and was savagely brutalized with cold pasta by several dozen irate inmates who were serving time for "grave offenses in bad taste" committed against the editors of *Architectural Digest*.

Yet Rocco will not be forgotten.