



by Brittany Moya del Pino

## KELILA JAFFE

NUTRITIONAL ANTHROPOLOGIST AND  
PROFESSIONAL CHEF

**Chef Kelila Jaffe** is no vampire, but she takes eating blood in stride. As a PhD student in New York University's nutrition and food studies program, she studies how humans have used animals—including their blood—as a source of food throughout history. She's also in charge of NYU's teaching kitchen.



**Platelets are tiny, disk-like components of blood that help with clotting.**

## **DO WE HAVE ANY IDEA WHEN HUMANS STARTED COOKING WITH BLOOD?**

The first recorded recipes that use blood are from the Yale University Babylonian tablet collection, which date back thousands of years. Those recipes call for blood used as a thickening agent in sauces and soups, and people still use it that way today.

## **BLOOD DOESN'T SOUND VERY APPETIZING. WHAT DOES IT TASTE LIKE?**

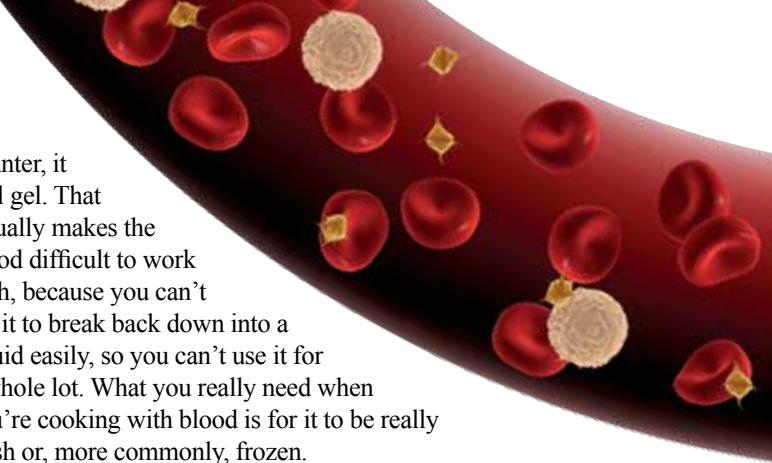
Blood has a savory-ness, an umami quality, but with a little extra minerality in the flavor, probably from all the iron it contains. Blood is also high in protein and fairly high in sodium, so it tastes naturally salty. It has a deep flavor with chocolately undertones, and it's generally pretty delicious.

## **I'M SORRY IF THIS IS GROSS, BUT I'VE GOT TO ASK: IS EATING BLOOD THE SAME AS EATING A SCAB?**

Cooked blood has gone through the same coagulation process [as a scab], but the difference is that chefs use whole liquid blood in their recipes, whereas with a scab you just get platelet buildup. In other words, with blood foods, you're not just eating a mass of platelets, but the total volume of the blood.

## **IS BLOOD COAGULATION LIKE COOKING AN EGG, WHERE HEAT CHANGES PROTEIN STRUCTURE?**

That's one aspect of it, but there's actually a whole chemical cascade that happens naturally to make blood "set up." So if you take fresh blood and just leave it out on the



counter, it will gel. That actually makes the blood difficult to work with, because you can't get it to break back down into a liquid easily, so you can't use it for a whole lot. What you really need when you're cooking with blood is for it to be really fresh or, more commonly, frozen.

## **WHERE DO YOU GET FROZEN BLOOD? I'VE NEVER SEEN IT NEXT TO THE FROZEN ORANGE JUICE OR ICE CREAM AT MY GROCERY STORE.**

Whenever I need to cook with blood, I buy it at a Filipino market that always has some in the freezer section, either from chickens, cows, or pigs. Pig blood is the most common ingredient for blood sausage, but you can use the blood from just about anything. And most of the blood you'll find for sale is going to be frozen, unless you have a relationship with a farmer who does slaughtering, or with a specialty butcher or a slaughterhouse that will take an order for fresh blood directly.

## **IN SOME CULTURES, BLOOD SAUSAGE IS A FAMILIAR MENU ITEM. HOW DID YOU FIRST LEARN THAT BLOOD COULD BE SERVED AS FOOD?**

I honestly can't tell you the first time I ate blood sausage, but it's always been in the background. I grew up in Sonoma, California, where my mom still works as a restaurant chef. One of the benefits of being the daughter of a chef is that I was exposed to a wide range of foods from a very early age. By the time I left home and was independently making all my own food choices, it was something I knew I liked and wouldn't shy away from eating. Now it's something that, as an adult, I really enjoy.



**"Umami" describes a meaty, satisfying flavor.**





Chefs at the Nordic Food Lab whipped blood into this bright foam. They suggest that it can replace eggs in some recipes.

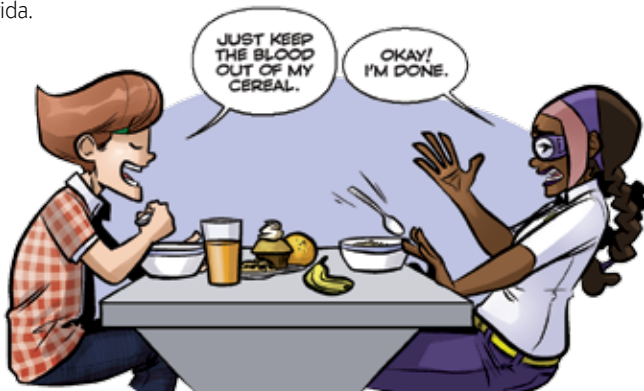
### IF MUSE READERS WANT TO TASTE BLOOD AS FOOD, WHERE COULD THEY FIND SOME?

The most common way you'll see blood sausage here in the United States is probably the British and Irish tradition, called "black pudding;" it's sliced into disks, pan fried until it's crispy on both sides, and served as part of a hearty, high-calorie breakfast with things like eggs and toast, and maybe a grilled tomato. In Scotland they might serve it with haggis, a dish made of organ meat.

*Morcilla* is another great way to try it if you have the opportunity to eat Spanish food; the binder in the sausage is rice, so it's a little less assertive in terms of its blood flavor than some of the other recipes. You also see some Mexican-style *morcillas* that are very similar to that Spanish dish. Germans have a blood sausage called *Blutwurst*, and I've had [blood sausage] in cuisine from all over Asia. Another good one to try would be the French Cajun version, which is called *boudin noir*.

But sausage isn't the only way you'll find blood being served as food. Some Chinese restaurants make what is essentially a blood jelly, where its allowed to coagulate and served in cubes, either on its own with some heavy black pepper and sometimes some sauce on it, or floated in soup or combined with other ingredients. The Filipino stew *dinuguan* uses blood to form gravy—they sometimes call it "chocolate pork," not because it has any chocolate in it, but just to make it a more squeamish-eater-friendly-sounding dish—and it's absolutely delicious. Chefs also experiment with how blood is incorporated in foods. For example, chefs at the Nordic Food Lab, which is a sort of incubator for food innovation, have been using blood in some very cutting-edge recipes for foams, meringues, cakes, and all kinds of interesting and edible science oddities.

**Brittany Moya del Pino** is a science writer and an adventurous eater based in Florida.



# BLODPLÄTTAR

COURTESY OF KELILA JAFFE



*This thin, crispy pancake made with blood is a traditional Scandinavian dish. Jaffe says, "I've seen it served with pork and onions or with lingonberry jam, or both."*

### INGREDIENTS

- » 1-1/2 cups pork blood (thawed and strained)
- » 1-1/2 cups milk
- » 1 tablespoon molasses
- » 1/2 teaspoon salt
- » 1-1/2 cups rye flour
- » Butter for cooking

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Whisk the blood and the milk together. Mix in the molasses and salt.
2. Whisk in the rye flour and stir until completely smooth.
3. Allow to rest so the flour has a chance to hydrate, about an hour.
4. Butter a hot pan and add blodplättar batter, working in batches. Cook until the edges are crispy and the little bubbles that form in the batter begin to hold their shape when they pop.
5. Flip the pancake over and continue to cook until the blodplättar is crisp. Serve hot.