

CATHY WURZER: If you're one of those lucky Minnesotans who has a cabin somewhere on a lake in the woods, the joy of getting away. Now, late November is not exactly prime cabin season. We know that. But Stephanie Hansen has some recipes that'll make your taste nostalgic for lakeside lunches and get-togethers under the stars.

Twin Cities radio listeners know Stephanie is the co-host of *The Weekly Dish* on FM 107. She also makes weekly appearances on Fox 9's national program *The Jason Show*. She's a food writer with a new book, the *True North Cabin Cookbook*. I am so excited that you're with me, Stephanie. How are you?

STEPHANIE HANSEN: I'm good, and I'm so excited to be with you, too. Jason said to say hi, by the way. We just did a segment this morning.

CATHY WURZER: [LAUGHS] Thank you. Right back at him. Say, let's talk a little bit about your-- this book, obviously. But I want to know, do you actually have a cabin up north? I'm assuming you do.

STEPHANIE HANSEN: I do. I have a cabin up north in Ely, Minnesota on Burnside Lake, which is right outside of the Boundary Waters. And it's on an island. So it's kind of a unique setup because we're the only people on the island.

And I would get questions from people all the time about what that feels like, or how do you get there. And so, during the pandemic, I was there a lot with my 91-year-old mother-in-law, and we started talking about family recipes and things that we wanted to document about our experience there, and cooking it, and writing it down.

CATHY WURZER: I love that. It's always great to get those stories and recipes from your elders, you know? I bet you learned a lot.

STEPHANIE HANSEN: I did. And my mom died when I was 42. Pretty young. She was in her early 60s. So we didn't have any of her recipes written down.

Turns out a lot of them came from Betty Crocker cookbooks, which was fine. I figured that out later. But my great grandma has a bunch of recipes. My grandma and my mother-in-law. So we wanted to capture all those things that we cooked at the cabin year after year. Janice's potato salad, Kurt's ribs. And we did that. We captured it all and put it in this book.

CATHY WURZER: Now, is this your first cookbook? I think it is, isn't it?

STEPHANIE HANSEN: It is. It's my first cookbook, and 170 recipes in. I actually started with 190, and they cut it down to 170. I really was like, oh, I don't know if I can write a cookbook, but I did it. It took me a year.

I wrote it. I shot all the pictures for it. I wrote the stories for it because I wanted each recipe to have a little bit of a place and a story so people understood why I put it in the book. But it was a fun process, but it was hard.

CATHY WURZER: Yeah, writing a book is very hard. I love the fact that the cookbook follows the cabin season, May through September. So what recipe kicks off cabin season for you in May?

STEPHANIE Well, of course, up in Ely, it's cold still. So the ice thaw out usually about May 18. And we're literally still wearing
HANSEN: winter coats, going over to the island and getting it open, and getting our food stores all situated for the summer season. So we eat a lot of soup when we're up there in the early months.

We also do roast some things in the oven to kind of keep the cabin warm. The May through September seasons of the book-- May and September up there are cold, so I felt like it was cooking for winter, even though it's still summer cabin season.

CATHY I see you have your beef bourguignon recipes. Was that one of--
WURZER:

STEPHANIE That was--
HANSEN:

CATHY I cannot do that. That is so hard.
WURZER:

STEPHANIE It is not hard. You just need to take your time. You brown the meat and the flour and some seasoning, and then
HANSEN: you add a little bit of stock to it. And then, when you're all done and you've got this rich gravy and the meat has been cooking in the oven for a couple of hours, you add some mushrooms, some carrots, some onions. That was one of the first fancy recipes I ever made.

CATHY Wow, you're more and more brave than I would ever be. I'm glad-- by the way, seriously. I'm glad you had a fish
WURZER: spread. Because I'm from the North Shore, or at least I have family ties in the North Shore, and there is a place that makes a fantastic salmon spread. You have a smoked whitefish spread that looks fantastic.

STEPHANIE I do. My daughter-- or not my daughter-- my niece, Sadie, went to college at UMD. And before she went to
HANSEN: college, she wasn't a very adventurous either. And I vividly remember having her at the cabin, and I was making this smoked trout dip.

And she said, oh, what are you making? And I said, oh, you won't like it. It's got smoked fish. And she said, well, no, now I like smoked fish. She said, I went to the Pickwick in Duluth, and they had this great dip.

So we laughed and bonded over the fact that her horizons of eating got a little more adventurous after being up at UMD. I think smoked fish is just so northern Minnesota. I don't know how you could get away with not eating smoked fish in Minnesota.

CATHY Exactly. What's one of the most memorable meals you've ever eaten?
WURZER:

STEPHANIE Oh, I can tell you the most memorable meal I've actually ever eaten was with Chef Jose Anders at the Cayman
HANSEN: Island cookout with Anthony Bourdain. And the chef made paella on the beach. I happened to be at this exclusive resort. It was a media opportunity. And it was before these cookouts became really popular.

So there was 200 people there. And chef had the big paella pan right on the beach, and Anthony Bourdain was smoking a cigar and sharing stories. It was a pretty incredible experience.

CATHY WURZER: But nothing like having your potato dumplings, I bet. And I say that, again, going back to the cookbook with the family recipes and the stories that go with them. There's got to be a story behind those potato dumplings.

STEPHANIE HANSEN: Yes, actually, there is. My grandma made these plum dumplings. It was my husband's mother's mother made plum dumplings. And you only make them in August because the Italian plums are in season then. And I always thought I would learn how to make them, but they're really hard. You have to roll them in sugar and make the special dough, and then you boil them. And that was too much for me.

So my mother-in-law said, well, just make potato dumplings. You just have leftover mashed potatoes, and you make that into a dough. And you just roll it into a rope and rustically cut them into little chunks. So you can do that and put them in the pot roast with the pork roast and some broth. And then the actual potato dumplings cook in the broth.

It's kind of how all of our grandmas used to do dumplings. So that's my cheater way of getting by not having to do the Italian plum dumplings because they were too hard.

CATHY WURZER: Love that, OK. Now, you have an event tomorrow for folks at the Lex, the Lexington, the famed Saint Paul bar and restaurant. What are you going to be doing there?

STEPHANIE HANSEN: They're so great. I've been doing these Makers in Minnesota dinners with them where we feature Makers. And the chef said to me, hey, how about we feature your cookbook, and I'll Cook recipes from the book. So we met and picked out recipes that he wanted to give the Lexington experience to. He'll make them a little cheffier.

I know he told me that he's going to do the split pea soup in a shooter as an appetizer, which is fun. He's going to make the pork roast with the potato dumplings we talked about. And then I have a sage gimlet that's a little bit different because it's made with aquavit. And there's a local Maker gamle ode that is made by Parallel 45th. It's actually in Wisconsin, and they have a dill aquavit that is infused with sage, and then lemon juice and simple syrup. And it just makes a heavenly cocktail. So they'll have that at the Lex, too.

CATHY WURZER: Oh, my gosh. You're full service, the food and the drink. I love that.

STEPHANIE HANSEN: Oh, yes.

CATHY WURZER: I love that stuff.

STEPHANIE HANSEN: There are drink recipes in the book. I'm crazy about rhubarb, so every season I make a rhubarb shrub and a rhubarb syrup. And then all season long, when people come and visit, I make little special holiday signature drinks with that for Memorial Day, and around July 4 I'll make something.

CATHY WURZER: Well, I am a huge fan of rhubarb, so I'll be over at your place. We'll be drinking together. That would be fun.

STEPHANIE HANSEN: Cathy, the rhubarb skillet cake in the book is real easy, and it's just a rhubarb cake that you make in a cast iron skillet.

CATHY Well, the fact that I cannot cook would make a show on its own just for the entertainment value. I'm telling you.

WURZER: So, this has been fun talking to you.

STEPHANIE You can appreciate good cooking, yeah.

HANSEN:

CATHY Yes, I appreciate those who can cook well, and you're among them. So, thank you so much, and best of luck

WURZER: tomorrow.

STEPHANIE Thanks, Cathy. I appreciate it.

HANSEN:

CATHY Absolutely. Stephanie Hansen, co-host, the Twin Cities radio program *Weekly Dish* on FM 107. Hosts the podcast

WURZER: *Makers of Minnesota*. She's the author of the *True North Cabin Cookbook*. You can find out more about Stephanie's cookbook and tomorrow's event at the Lexington on her website, stephaniesdish.com.

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CATHY --is generally in the 30s at this hour. One of the warmer spots appears to be Appleton, where it's 39 degrees. It's

WURZER: 40 in Worthington. Highs around the region today, lower 30s in the north, mid-40s in the south ahead of this winter storm that we'll hear more about, of course. John Wanamaker is with us right now at 12:25 with a look at the news. John.

JOHN Cathy, Russian strikes in Ukraine have cut off power to many hospitals. Scheduled operations are being

WANAMAKER: postponed. Patient records are unavailable because of internet outages and paramedics have had to use flashlights to examine patients.

The World Health Organization said last week that Ukraine's health system is facing, quote, "its darkest days in the war so far." That's amid the growing energy crisis and the onset of cold winter weather. The white gunman who killed 10 Black people at a Buffalo supermarket has pleaded guilty to murder and hate-motivated terrorism charges. Payton Gendron's plea means he'll spend his life in prison without parole. The 19-year-old modified a legally purchased semiautomatic rifle into an assault weapon before targeting the Tops Friendly Market in May. Gendron previously pleaded not guilty to separate federal hate crime charges that could carry the death penalty.

And barely a month after granting himself a third five-year term as China's leader, Xi Jinping is facing a wave of public anger over his zero-COVID policy. Demonstrators poured into the streets over the weekend in cities, including Shanghai and Beijing, in protests unprecedented since the 1989 student-led, pro-democracy movement centered on Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Most protesters focused their anger on restrictions that confined families to their homes for months, and have been criticized as neither scientific or effective. But some also shouted for Xi and the Communist Party that has ruled China for 73 years to give up power.

For the first time in nearly four decades, Hawaii's Mauna Loa has started to erupt, prompting volcanic ash and debris to fall nearby. The US Geological Survey says the world's largest active volcano began erupting late Sunday night on the big island. Earlier today, it said lava flows were contained within the summit area and were not threatening nearby communities. However, nearby residents should review their eruption preparation, that according to officials. Scientists had been on alert because of a recent spike in earthquakes at the summit of the volcano, which erupted last in 1984.

On Wall Street, all major indexes down around 1%. This is MPR News.

CATHY WURZER: Thank you, John. More than half of all Americans found an election denier on their ballot during the primary election. The influence of politicians who believe that the 2020 election was stolen from Donald Trump is not going away. At least 170 of those candidates were elected this month, and many of them gained popularity on ultra-conservative talk radio. Minneapolis-based independent journalist Katie Thornton just came out with a new five-part series on WNYC's show *On The Media* about how the American Right came to dominate talk radio, and how one company is launching a conservative media empire on the airwaves.

And Katie is on the line right now to talk about it. Welcome back to the program.

KATIE THORNTON: Thanks so much, Cathy. Nice to be here.

CATHY WURZER: I started working in talk radio at about the time it started to take a turn to the right with Rush Limbaugh. Was Rush the kingpin, or were there others who lit the fuse?

KATIE THORNTON: Yes, such a great question. So often, the story that we hear told is that Rush Limbaugh was the catalyst for a lot of the talk radio that we hear today. And there's definitely an ounce of truth to that. But what we found out in this series is that the history runs much, much deeper. It starts far earlier than Rush Limbaugh, and a lot of folks said that when Rush Limbaugh passed away that his listeners would perhaps go to different podcasts or different websites, find that type of brash, very conservative-leaning content elsewhere on different media platforms. But a lot of that content is still circulating on the public airwaves.

CATHY WURZER: And who's behind it now? I mean, Rush had his own empire, but there are other companies that are also involved.

KATIE THORNTON: Yeah, absolutely. It's a far-reaching and multifaceted industry. In the series in particular, we end up looking at one company called Salem Media Group in particular. We call them perhaps the most influential media company you've never heard of. They are a multimedia company, but their bread and butter is really the AM and FM radio stations.

They have four stations in Minneapolis. I can pick up for Salem stations from my home in Minneapolis. There are cities in the US that have five Salem stations. A lot of cities have two Salem stations.

They're just one company, but they are highly influential. A lot of their program hosts are very far right, often pushing right wing conspiracy theories on the airwaves. And not only do they own over 100 stations across the country. They also syndicate their programs to over 3,000 stations across the country. So whether you're in a large major city or you're in a small town, you can likely hear a Salem host on the airwaves.

CATHY WURZER: And you mentioned that Salem has a lot of AM radio stations. For listeners who don't understand our business, a lot of this started on AM radio stations as those stations became-- they were bought up by a lot of these companies. Can you talk about the role of a AM radio stations specifically in this mix?

KATIE THORNTON: Yeah, sure. In the series, we do a couple of episodes that take a deep dive into the history of the talk radio industry, which it's really just endlessly fascinating and sets us up to understand the present in a much more robust way. But one of the things that happened in the 1970s was that the FM band opened up. The FM band is, compared to AM, crystal clear sonically.

And so a lot of the music stations went over to the AM band. And that had-- went over to the FM band, I'm sorry. And that left the AM band struggling to find what set them apart. And in the 1970s and into the 1980s, they really landed on talk radio.

In the 1980s was the ERA of the shock jock, and it became popular pretty quickly for talk radio hosts to bring some of the brash shock jock energy to political talk shows. And that was really when you saw the surge in highly politicized, somewhat abrasive talk radio. Really took off in the 1980s.

Some of the other things we detail in the series are these deregulatory measures that happened over the course of the 1980s, and especially into the 1990s, that deregulated the industry, both economically and in terms of content, which led to a lot of consolidation, which ended up pushing the radio dial very far toward the right.

CATHY WURZER: Mhm. Good history lesson there, by the way. So we are now in this situation where we have had January 6, and there are, as you say, still very strong ultra-conservative talk shows out there. I'm curious, how did these stations maybe affect January 6 and fueled so-called election deniers?

KATIE THORNTON: Absolutely. I mean, one of the things I think we really need to understand is that talk radio and radio in general still has an incredibly large influence in the country. I think rumors of radio's death have been very overblown for many, many, many years. And talk radio still has a-- I'm sorry, radio still has a higher reach than television. Radio is nearly neck-and-neck with social media for how Americans choose to get their news.

And talk radio, and especially some of these Salem stations that host who we look into, were really among the loudest voices who were pushing the ideas of the stolen election after 2020. Even before the 2020 election, they were parroting the idea that Donald Trump was saying that if the election wasn't won by him, it would have had to have been stolen. And in the immediate aftermath of the election, talk radio was a place where lies about the stolen election really, really took hold.

A lot of the talk radio shows that you listen to, if you can find them in the archives or if you record them in the interim period between the election and January 6, were promoting a lot of the same falsehoods about how Trump could secure a second term that a lot of people were then calling for on the steps of the Capitol on January 6.

CATHY WURZER: So you did, obviously, a lot of research for this series, and it's terrific. What surprised you the most during your reporting?

KATIE THORNTON: Yeah, it's such a good question because I am a huge fan of radio. I started doing this project because I love the medium, and I wanted to have a greater understanding of how it came to be that one side of the political spectrum came to have such a grasp on talk radio. I've worked on and off in radio since I was quite young, since I was a teenager working behind the scenes doing reporting as well. And even I was still surprised at just how much influence radio still has in the American public and on American politics.

The reach is just extraordinary. A lot of people still rely on it. And I would also add that the other thing that surprised me is just how organized and strategic and, frankly, well connected some of these radio companies, including Salem, are to leaders in the right wing movements, and also in the Republican Party. And also, that their reach is not just limited to radio. Although radio is very, very influential, the company Salem is a multimedia company.

They own some of the largest conservative news sites, like Hot Air, and Red State, and Town Hall. They also have an influencer network. They have a production house and a streaming service. They have daily podcasts. They have a service that sells sermons to pastors. So they really are far reaching.

And somebody may be listening to a Salem radio station, and then getting their online news from a Salem website, perhaps hearing a sermon shared by a pastor that was sold through a Salem service, and never know that these are all coming from the same company.

CATHY WURZER: Do you have advice for listeners to be a smart consumer of this information? What would you recommend for them?

KATIE THORNTON: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I think, building on the last point, it's not always clear just how consolidated the media industry is. So I think it's possible to have what one may perceive as a somewhat balanced media diet without it being glaringly obvious that a lot of that material might be coming from the same company or the same very small group of people. So ensuring that you have a diversity of perspectives within the media that you're consuming.

Radio is the most trusted medium. Very frequently ranks as the most trusted medium among Americans. And I think that there is a lot of potential to that because radio also has a lot of incredible content, too, which takes a deep dive into the right wing conspiracy radio networks and far right radio networks. But there's a lot of potential to reach people where they're at and to get a variety of voices on the air using radio too.

CATHY WURZER: Mhm, and that's why I love radio. Thank you so much, Katie Thornton. I appreciate it. Good work, by the way.

KATIE THORNTON: Thank you very much. It's great to talk with you.

CATHY WURZER: Likewise. Katie Thornton is a Minneapolis-based independent journalist and a historian.