# "Every Recipe Has a Story": An Interview with Diana Kennedy

## Eric James Schroeder

*Diana Kennedy is often referred to as the "Julia Child of Mexican Cooking" (except by her fellow Brits, who see her at the "Elizabeth David of Mexican Cooking.") Her lifelong interest in the cuisines of Mexico began in 1957 when she married* New York Times *correspondent Paul Kennedy and settled in Mexico City. She began studying local ingredients and cooking techniques and became an avid collector of Mexican regional recipes. In 1966 she moved to New York City where Paul Kennedy died the following year. At the urging of* The New York Times' *food editor Craig Claiborne, in 1969 she began giving Mexican cooking lessons in her New York City apartment. She published her first book,* The Cuisines of Mexico, *in 1972, (it's one of three volumes now included in* The Essential Cuisines of Mexico*); to this day, the book remains perhaps the most authoritative single volume on Mexican cooking. Over the years since then, Ms. Kennedy has divided her time between Mexico where she works from her home in Zitácuaro, Michoacán and the US where she still travels extensively, giving cooking classes and speaking about Mexican cuisine. With the recent publication of* Oaxaca al Gusto: An Infinite Gastronomy, *Ms. Kennedy has now published nine books, as well as numerous magazine articles. In 1981 the Mexican government awarded her the Order of the Aztec Eagle for her writings on regional Mexican cuisine and in 2002 the British Government awarded her an MBE for furthering cultural relations between Mexico and the United Kingdom.*

*I met Ms. Kennedy last fall when she visited UC Davis as part of a book tour to promote* Oaxaca al Gusto. *Her talk was given to a standing-room-only crowd of enthusiastic foodies. Several months later I visited her at her "eco-house" in Zitácuaro (the earthen house is built into a hillside; she conserves water and electricity.) I spent a day with her and the film crew who were making a documentary about her. We began the morning by visiting the market where she shopped for ingredients for a cooking class she was doing that afternoon. After we did the interview, she served a delicious dish of chicken in a red mole sauce and black beans—heaven!*

**WOE**: In the acknowledgements of *Cuisines of Mexico* you thank 65 people—not just editors but also botanists, archeologists, fish and game researchers, and many local Mexican women who contributed recipes.

What was your vision for the book? It's obviously something much more than just a cookbook.

**KENNEDY**: I had no vision. I was just putting down what I found. I never thought of myself as a writer. I never thought of myself as anything. I just wondered whether people would be as interested as I was in where recipes came from and why they happened and things like that. It just happened as most things in my life have. I don't think I've planned my life.

**WOE**: Did you imagine a reader when you were working on the book?

**KENNEDY**: I really didn't. I suppose in a way it was a selfish thing. Some dishes can be interesting but not very delicious, but these dishes were ones that I loved to eat. My curiosity about regional cuisines came about because when my husband, Paul, was alive and I was first living in Mexico, I started to cook Mexican foods. I found that people from different parts of Mexico had different recipes. But the early cookbooks of Mexico were mainly composed mostly of Spanish recipes. I was alerted to regional cuisines through the books of Josefina Velázquez de León, who had a cooking academy in the 1950s and 1960s in Mexico City. She collected recipes by going to church groups all over Mexico. Her books were key in getting me launched into going to different regions and seeing what they're all about. Then in 1969 started to give Mexican cooking classes on Sunday afternoons in my very small New York kitchen.

After Paul died I started giving classes in New York. The then poetry editor at Harper and Row asked me asked me to do my first book. I thought that to do a book I'd have to go back to Mexico, travel all around, and just put down what I saw. So I really had nothing in view. It just sort of happened. I was amazed and delighted at its reception.

**WOE**: Over the years has your sense of audience changed? One of the reasons I ask about audience is that before you even get to the recipes in *The Cuisines of Mexico*, you have a 55-page section called "Ingredients and Procedures." Were you worried this might put some readers off?

**KENNEDY**: No, I really didn't worry about it. I just had no idea where this book was going. I'm aware of having an audience now, and I like it. I always say, "All ages, all colors, and all sexes." That is how I like it.

**WOE**: I love the way that your voice comes out in your books—the editorial comments you make in your recipes are sometimes very pointed. For instance, your instructions for *arroz con pollo* say, "Do not freeze this recipe. The chicken will be horrible."

**KENNEDY**: It's quite true. Everybody wants to freeze it, so I think of that leathery old chicken by the time it comes out of the freezer. I know some people freeze it because they're going off and they have a family and they've got to have things tucked away in their fridge. But if we are talking about buying a cookbook and wanting a recipe to be as good as possible, you don't freeze it.

**WOE**: Your voice also comes out in the stories that precede the recipes, making your books more than collections of how-to recipes. Sometimes there's a history of the recipe, an anecdote about a particular version, or a story about the ingredients. Are these something that came naturally to you or were they something that you worked at when you were putting *The Cuisines of Mexico* together?

**KENNEDY**: I think it comes naturally. But part of that is just how I feel a recipe should be presented. A recipe just doesn't come about. I felt that a recipe had a meaning and one had to explain it. I felt it was necessary to explain it and this process made it much more fun to write the book, to remember those scenes and remember the cooks. Every recipe has a story. Every family in Mexico has a food story, has a book (and this is going to disappear). When I started teaching classes students would mention something that their grandmother had cooked, and I'd say, "Have you written that down? Have you taken photos?" They'd say, "No" and I'd ask, "Why not? You're telling me about this but you've got to save this. It's part of your family history." Because food is history, you know. But they hadn't thought about it that way—they just went to grandma's house and ate and thought it was delicious. But they never thought to record it.

I'll tell you a story. When I was first writing the book, the cookbook editor from Harper & Row came down to Mexico all the time but she didn't like the food, so she didn't want the cookbook. But Fran McCullough, who was the poetry editor at Harper & Row and who became my editor, said, "No, no. I've seen this article in *The New York Times* about her cooking classes and we have to do this cookbook." When she approached me about it, I said, "But, Fran, I can't write." I gave her some of what I had written, then went off to Mexico for my usual research trip. When I came back, I read what I had written, tore it up and began again. When she read the new material, she said, "Oh, what happened in the summer? You've taught yourself to write!" Later she admitted that the early writing had been bad but that she hadn't wanted to tell me at the time.

**WOE**: So how *did* you teach yourself to write?

**KENNEDY**: I have no idea. I think I came back and looked at that first draft. Fran didn't tell me, "My God, she can't write." I just sat down and rewrote. I had seen my husband when he was writing a book or article that he was working on. It was the discipline of sitting down every day to write. So for me, I suppose, it was sitting down and thinking a little bit more, and then rewriting—and getting more involved with Mexico.

I've been a great reader all my life. As children my sister and I read all the books from the local public library. Some were silly sentimental books and many were classics. I was an avid reader. So maybe when I had an objective it came together. I can only think that's what happened. I don't consider myself to have any particular talent except that I love to cook. Writing was something that just came out. It was nascent and then it came out. And this was on a typewriter, you know. When I think about the number of times I would destroy one page, then start another.… It was like pulling teeth. But I would go off walking, come back, and look at things. Gradually, it came together.

**WOE**: There's another form of rewriting you do, and that's rewriting recipes. One of my favorite recipes of yours is *chiles en nogada*. You have a recipe for it in *The Cuisines of Mexico* and I have a recipe for it that you did for *The Los Angeles Times*, which is very similar to the one in *Cuisines*, but then later you published another in *Essentials* that is totally different from the other two.

**KENNEDY**: This is what I've found in my travels. The recipes vary from cook to cook, from family to family. The first recipe is what people were cooking in the capital back then, and you know Mexico City was much smaller then. And then later for two years running I was a judge in Puebla for *chiles en nogada*. I didn't like the recipes very much! They were very sweet—they had masses of fruit in them and hardly any meat. And generally the sauce was too sweet. (The food all over Mexico is getting sweeter—it's been getting too much influence from the US.) The last one has a different way of cooking the meat and it was a whole different recipe. It was so interesting that things have changed so much over the years.

Interestingly enough, this has happened to me other times, too. I had some lovely recipes from Tampico published in *The Cuisines of Mexico.* But when I went back to Tampico many years later, I found these same dishes weren't as good. Or people weren't doing them as well. Or they'd changed. Then I went back two years ago. I was asked to give some classes in Tampico. I said I was going to be very arrogant and do some recipes that I learned thirty or forty years earlier, and the students were surprised and overwhelmed. They loved the older versions of the recipes and there and then decided to "reinstate" them.

If you've been seriously eating, you can't get to this age in life and not have built up a palate. That's why I criticize my own food—sometimes I taste something and say, "Oh my God!" I remember flavors. I remember them because I've been cooking these recipes through the years.

**WOE**: Can we go back for a moment to your reading? I wonder if there were any writers then who were models for your writing?

**KENNEDY**: The model for my writing was, without a doubt, Elizabeth David. She had a wonderful command of English and a wonderful palate. She evoked flavors in words. She was my role model. I can't think of another writer at that time who did this. Everyone says M.F.K. Fisher did this, but I think those books were entirely different.

**WOE**: Structure is a major component of a book like *Cuisines*, which is organized by courses or categories of foods. This is unlike the Oaxaca book, which is organized by regions within the state. How do you organize a book?

**KENNEDY**: I don't. It's usually the editor who decides. There is a standard organization for cookbooks—soups, appetizers, etc. But you couldn't possibly divide Oaxacan food into those categories. The excitement for me in Oaxaca is the panoramic view of the cuisines and putting the food and the people who live there into that context. It's an entirely different book. Of course people said, " Why isn't there a general index for the Oaxaca book?" but there aren't that many recipes in each section. If you want to make tamales surely you could go into one of the regional indices and find a recipe? This is going to sound rather arrogant—especially with my British accent—but I often say that it's not a book for how Americans and people outside Mexico can cook every day of their lives. It's how Oaxaca eats. Why shouldn't there be that sort of grown-up book?

**WOE**: You began the Oaxaca book in 1994 and didn't finish until 2008. Can you talk about some of the difficulties with that book?

**KENNEDY**: A representative of the governor of Oaxaca asked me back then if I would do it and I said yes. I was sent with a chauffeur to lots of places, but then the money ran out for the research. So then I tried to get a publisher to produce it. I was told by my lawyer not to do it with the one person who wanted to do it, because this person had a reputation for never paying anybody. This publisher does beautiful books but I never would have received a penny. In the meantime I was traveling and putting the book together. Then I lost three years with a woman who was going to publish the book, but twice she made me change it around. I suddenly realized that there was no editor. I wasn't

allowed to work with a designer, which was crucial for that book. And because there was no general editor, they wanted to keep changing it. This woman publisher wanted to put the book into more formal chapters. When I was doing that I suddenly thought, "This isn't going to be the book I want." I had wanted to say, "This is the panorama, this is the culture, these are the people, this what grows here." One area is so totally different than the other areas. She was missing the whole magic of Oaxacan cuisines. They're totally different—totally different. So I finally took my papers away and started again. Then it was at a dinner party after a class in San Miguel de Allende that a Mexican businessman said he would do it.

Luckily, I ended up with wonderful editor who is bilingual, almost totally. She thought up the idea of the pillars of Oaxacan cuisine, which was a wonderful thing. The pillars made sense because I was worried, "You've got all these tortillas—what are you going to do with those? You've got all these chocolate things." She came up with that idea, which I thought was wonderful. She's a great friend; she's lovely. We worked together very harmoniously.

**WOE**: I'd like to talk more about editors and about the structural elements in your books. For instance, in *Essentials* you have these short essays at the beginning of sections.

**KENNEDY**: They came from the three earlier books that made up *Essentials*. Each book was a gastronomical experience. They had to be woven together and for this reason *Essentials* was difficult. Fran McCullough, my first editor, put it together. It was not possible to add everything into that book—we did it but it was not a tidy style.

In contrast to editors, copy editors love things that go one-two-three. And there's a reason for it. I think, without a doubt, the most understandable recipes are in the US since in these books the ingredients and cooking steps are perfectly ordered. In some countries where they don't do that you can get a lot of surprises—you suddenly say, "Oops! I've forgotten that ingredient." You look at the French, you look at the Mexican and they're all over the place. But any copy editor can carry things too far. For instance, in many recipes, you are told to light the oven to 450 degrees and then *one* hour later you're still working on the recipe and it isn't in the oven yet. I think that's a tremendous waste of energy. It's ridiculous—it's carrying the editing of a recipe too far. In one particular article, the recipe called for a roasted tomato; the magazine editor wrote: "Preheat the oven to 350 degrees." One little tomato needs the oven to 350 degrees for 10 minutes? And you're going to light your oven for that? No, no. That's absurd. I'd rather do it the Mexican way on a *comal* or griddle.

When you think back and you read about authors of the early part of the twentieth century, you realize that some of the famous authors' work was looked over extensively by the editors who were much more powerful then, not like the copy editors of today. They were very keen editors. Some well-known American and English writers had manuscripts rejected and then they rewrote them several times. Everyone needs a good editor, and unfortunately these days there are very few good editors.

**WOE**: So what about the littlest pieces in *Cuisines*? You have these structural elements like the chapter headings. One of the ones I'm thinking of specifically is the one called "Masa Fantasies." Were those yours or were those McCullough's?

**KENNEDY**: "Masa Fantasies"—I'm pretty sure that was mine because those recipes *are* fantasies, depending on where you are and what the ingredients are, how the cooks imagine them in different ways. When I was putting together *The Tortilla Book* I simply divided those particular recipes into the section that focused on what you could do with *masa*. As a book it came together very nicely. It was many people's favorite book at the time.

*The Tortilla Book* came about because I had had this jogging accident—I had been jogging in the wrong way and had injured myself. I had to sit on a stool and I couldn't go walking. I luckily dreamed this project up and enjoyed doing it very much. But originally it was a way to occupy myself. I'm a very active person and I hate to be sitting still. I can't spend my days sitting down. So it came out because of this accident and it was a natural thing to do.

**WOE**: Some writers find research difficult but writing easy and some writers find the opposite. What about you?

**KENNEDY**: I love doing the research. And with any good cookbooks they are lots of steps. You cook the recipes. And if you're not satisfied you cook them again. And then you write. To have to sit down for hours at the computer and write… [*groans*]. I just hate sitting down for long amounts of time. That's my problem. I do enjoy some of the writing—I enjoy bringing to life some of those scenes I write about. I have a little laugh remembering them. Some of those culinary experiences are ones that I'll never forget. For instance, the time I spent in the bakery was just extraordinary.

**WOE**: What was so extraordinary about this time?

**KENNEDY**: It was extraordinary, first of all, because at that time they wouldn't let a woman work in a bakery. But the maestro there, a won-

derful little man, said yes I could come along. I think he was tickled pink that somebody wanted to learn, especially a woman who was also a foreigner. A *gringa*, as they called me, wanted to learn this. I just so desperately wanted to learn. And I did learn an awful lot. Nobody had ever written these things down in detail and I thought it was terribly important to do this. So I went every day to learn and write about it.

It was also extraordinary to see how they worked in the bakery. For instance, there was a hole in the bottom of the huge mixer and the Spanish owners didn't want to buy a new one, so they had to put a bit of dough in the bottom before using it. How they improvised with what they had! Their improvised *almuerzo*—their brunch—was just fascinating. I learned an awful lot. The team spirit there was wonderful, and everyone was so thrilled when my first *conchas* came out looking beautiful (these breads are named for the shell-like sugar pattern on top). It was a great experience. It was hard work and wonderful.

**WOE**: Readers who come to your work and find *Nothing Fancy* are probably amazed that it's so different from your other books—it's like a scrapbook. In it you go from making headcheese to talking about how to do a proper afternoon tea.

**KENNEDY**: Yes, it is a scrapbook. It came from a scrapbook. I'm glad you mentioned that. It was lots of fun to do. Except for the introduction. I see it as lovely little bits of scrap, browning paper, my notes. And it really means something.

When I started it I was just hunting around for something to do. At that time there was no way I could have done a regional book. No editor would have taken it. My chief income was from teaching and producing books in the US because I was living there. I think, actually, that it was Fran McCullough's husband, David, who suggested it.

**WOE**: There are some recipes from other cookbooks that you really liked in *Nothing Fancy*—for example, the meatloaf recipe from the Alice B. Toklas cookbook.

**KENNEDY**: And how many people know that? It's absolutely superb. It's the best Polish meatloaf in the world. It's just wonderful. I may have changed the recipe slightly (which I know is arrogant). But I think it's very, very important to say where one's inspiration comes from. You can't do everything yourself. But if you're a good cook and you change the recipe a bit (which I'm sure the authors really don't like), that's okay. On the other hand, I've had bad cooks change my recipes.…

I'm inspired by cookbooks. I cook some of the most difficult recipes in Paula Wolfert's book on Southwest France, which I think is a superb book. I also do her Georgian home-style cheese bread pie. Which fell

apart, by the way, when I did it the other day. First time ever. But that happens. That's cooking. You've got to be really on the ball. It's the biggest come-uppance in the world. Things happen. You can be sure of something, and the day you want it to come out perfectly it will flop. How many times has your soufflé flopped when you just want it to do what you want?

**WOE**: Can you talk about the relationship between your teaching and your writing?

**KENNEDY**: Out of those classes in New York came that first book. Fran spotted an article in the *New York Times* that said I would be teaching these classes. She came by immediately and said, "I want a book." For the classes I wanted to bring more material in. I would go back to Mexico and work for three months traveling around and writing.

But in terms of the teaching influencing the writing itself, I'm not sure if it has. It's interesting to have students' comments about the recipes: sometimes they get me to explain a little bit more. But overall I don't think teaching has had a big influence on my writing.

**WOE**: How have your books been received by your Mexican audience?

**KENNEDY**: People love them. A couple years ago on a Sunday (which is sacred to me unless I have guests coming for lunch) the dogs started barking—there were people at the gate. Relatives of my neighbors who were visiting from Los Angeles were coming with books they wanted me to sign. There was no way I could say no. A relative of one of my neighbors had brought all of my books in Spanish. They said they loved the way I wrote abut their country.

**WOE**: Have most of your books been published in Spanish now?

**KENNEDY**: All except *From My Mexican Kitchen.* I do not do the translating. It's very boring to translate. And there have been problems. Some of them have been very bad publications. Very badly designed, for instance. They were unwieldy, they were expensive, and the publishers didn't know how to sell them. The first book to be published in Spanish was *Cuisines* many years ago, but the translation was so bad I cancelled its publication. Some of them are out of print now but I have people interested in publishing them all again in Spanish. The Oaxacan book was an exception to this since I wrote it in Spanish first and then translated it into English.

I can write the recipes perfectly well in Spanish but the text is something else. Writing in Spanish is not easy. The recipes, yes, that's easy. But I do need an editor for the text because, though I can get the ideas across, they need polishing. When I was doing it I was sort of halfway through and then started to do it in English as well.

**WOE**: You emphasize that the book concerns the cuisines of Oaxaca. The plural is very important.

**KENNEDY**: Because all the distinctive areas of Oaxaca have different cuisines. For instance corn, chiles and beans are always present but differ in their preparations from one region to another as do the gathered foods and the aromatic herbs used.

**WOE**: The Oaxaca book is amazing in its scope. I've heard you say that people would cook only about 30% of the recipes. But I think sometimes it's the other recipes that are the most fascinating. Like the iguana tamales. I think about a reader who is coming to your work for the first time, who reads the note that tell us to use the black iguana and not the green one.

**KENNEDY**: Well, after all, it wasn't me who said that—it was the cook.

**WOE**: Okay, but you tell us how to singe it and you tell us how to gut it. I think a lot of readers would be thinking at this point, "Is she serious?"

**KENNEDY**: There is always somebody who wants to know how to clean an iguana, so why not? In trying to get the book published in the US, I, in frustration, sent a whole list of recipes to an editor and an agent: "Do you really need to tell people how to cook an iguana?" was the only comment that came back concerning the 320 recipes I sent.

I remember a similar case from when I was working on ***The Art of Mexican Cooking***. Fran McCullough thought it was unnecessary to tell readers how to "draw" (take out the innards) of a chicken or the ink sac from an octopus. But somebody has to tell this to readers!

**WOE**: You've taken an increasingly larger role in the production of your books. You started publishing some of your own photographs a few books back and then you did virtually all of the photographs for the Oaxaca book.

**KENNEDY**: That just came about. It's important to have good photographs. Now, because of the costs of publishing a book, editors want to cut out all of my photos. They did this, for instance, with the reissue of *The Art*. Despite the other problems that I mentioned, the Spanish editions of my books have more photographs than the English ones do. Well, *My Mexico* still has some of my photos in it. But while photography in general is difficult, food photography is a pain.

**WOE**: All the food photography in *Oaxaca* is so wonderful I would have thought you enjoyed it.

**KENNEDY**: No. Well, yes. But, for instance, when I think back on doing *My Mexican Kitchen*…. Michael Calderwood, the photographer, is a marvelous guy—but that darn bread! Something happened, you see.

Flour is a very living thing. I was doing the *pan de muertos* and it went out of control. It was either the yeast or the flour—suddenly it would blow out of shape in the oven. Food is the most difficult photography; food is the most temperamental thing.

**WOE**: What makes it so difficult?

**KENNEDY**: Because of all the elements that go into it—for example, you've got to have it looking fresh. You can't do tricks—I never do tricks—if you do, people can't make the recipes. The camera is ready, and just as you've got the steam and everything right, the camera needs a new battery. Ohhhhhh! Food photography is so exacting. It's not something I want to do—I'd rather go off into the wild.

**WOE**: In the introduction to *Oaxaca,* you say, "I'm not an academic, historian, anthropologist or botanist but just an adventurous cook and lover of the natural world." I think you sell yourself short in that quote. For instance, you are an extraordinary botanist.

**KENNEDY**: Not really, because I have such a bad memory now. I'm also a bit dyslexic. It's just that in my Mexican home (which is also my laboratory) I've got a lot of plants. Botanists are interested and they come. I've had botanist friends from everywhere who help me identify my plants. They're not all identifiable. If you look in a big plant dictionary—either the one published by Cambridge or Kew Gardens—you will find many omissions of Mexican plants because the biodiversity here is so great and so many species haven't yet been recognized. I'm an amateur. But I'm very excited that Dr. José Sarukhán Kermez, the ex-Rector at the National University, has talked about the book at the Institute of Biology. It's a great honor. And my photos are being digitized and my notes scanned to go into the bio-database of Mexico. It's a wonderful tribute for someone who's a non-professional. I didn't go to university because World War II broke out—I had to go do war service instead.

**WOE**: But as a non-professional botanist, you are extraordinary; for example, you are considered one of the world's experts on chiles—when you were in Davis you mentioned that there were three species of chiles you knew of that only exist in a couple of small plots.

**KENNEDY**: Well, I do know more chiles than many people and I have piles of chiles at my home. I'm not a scientist, but I do know how they're used—I've got a grass-roots knowledge. And regarding those chiles—I've been to see them recently. It's not a species; it's a variety, I think. I went there to try and get these chiles brought back into production. I talked to the main chile growers to learn what their problems are. Their current problems are climate change, new types of insect plagues, and plant diseases that have not been addressed. The government hasn't

addressed this, which is so sad; it hasn't had scientists going down there to figure out what specific thing is happening to these chiles.

Climate change is a big problem for Mexico. Look at the excessive rains, the amount of flooding, and the hurricanes that didn't occur before. I've measured rain here for the past twenty-five years, and it's very alarming to see what's happening.

**WOE**: With all your interests, do you write every day?

**KENNEDY**: If I'm in the middle of a book, yes. Usually at about 5 o'clock in the afternoon I'll go up and write until about 9 or 10. That's my best time.

You see, I also have to run this place. In the US I don't have to work at keeping my place going. But here this place needs running. I need to shop and cook myself. Luckily I have help to wash things, to repair things, and to work in the garden. Thank goodness. We just had to redo the rustic outhouse, but we hadn't got any nails so I had to drive into town to buy nails. We're stretched very thin here because I can't afford any more help. And then there's the computer—I wish there was somebody in town who works with Macs.

I had to get a new printer and a new scanner because the ants eat all the stuff off the screens. (I lost three of my machines to the ants because I didn't know the ants come out at night and eat something they like on the screens.) Then the new machines wouldn't work with my programs on the Mac because I couldn't update the software. Luckily the botanist who was working here has a daughter who is a great expert and she happened to have a disc with the upgrades—but it played havoc with my e-mails.

**WOE**: Were you slow in making the transition from your old typewriter to the computer?

**KENNEDY**: Terribly slow. I resisted for years and when I look back now at what I was writing on the typewriter…aargh. I was never a very good typist. I resisted the computer and I was a fool to have resisted it. Still, generally I cannot edit on the machine. It depends which type of writing I'm doing. If it's a business letter, then I can do it on the thing. But if it's a bit of writing for a book I want it printed out.

**WOE**: Have you ever considered writing an autobiography?

**KENNEDY**: Everybody has asked me that and I think I would get bored stiffed doing it. But I think I'll make the reissue of *Nothing Fancy* more autobiographical. I'll add recipes and maybe reflections about what I think today. It's not going to be very lofty.

People have asked me if they can do my biography and I've said no. They want to know salacious things I would never talk about. And

I don't think my life is that interesting. Autobiographies can be very self-serving unless they are written by a literate person who has had a fascinating political or adventurous life.

**WOE**: What are you working on at the moment?

**KENNEDY**: I'm in recess. I'm working with a botanist on my papers and books, and then I hope I'll get some funding next year to do more research on indigenous foods. At the moment I also have a couple of filmmakers following me around, doing a documentary on my life. I am hoping to do more research and writing on the indigenous foods of Mexico—that is if I can get some grant money. It's so isolating to do another large book and time-consuming when I have so few years left.

Eric James Schroeder teaches at UC Davis.