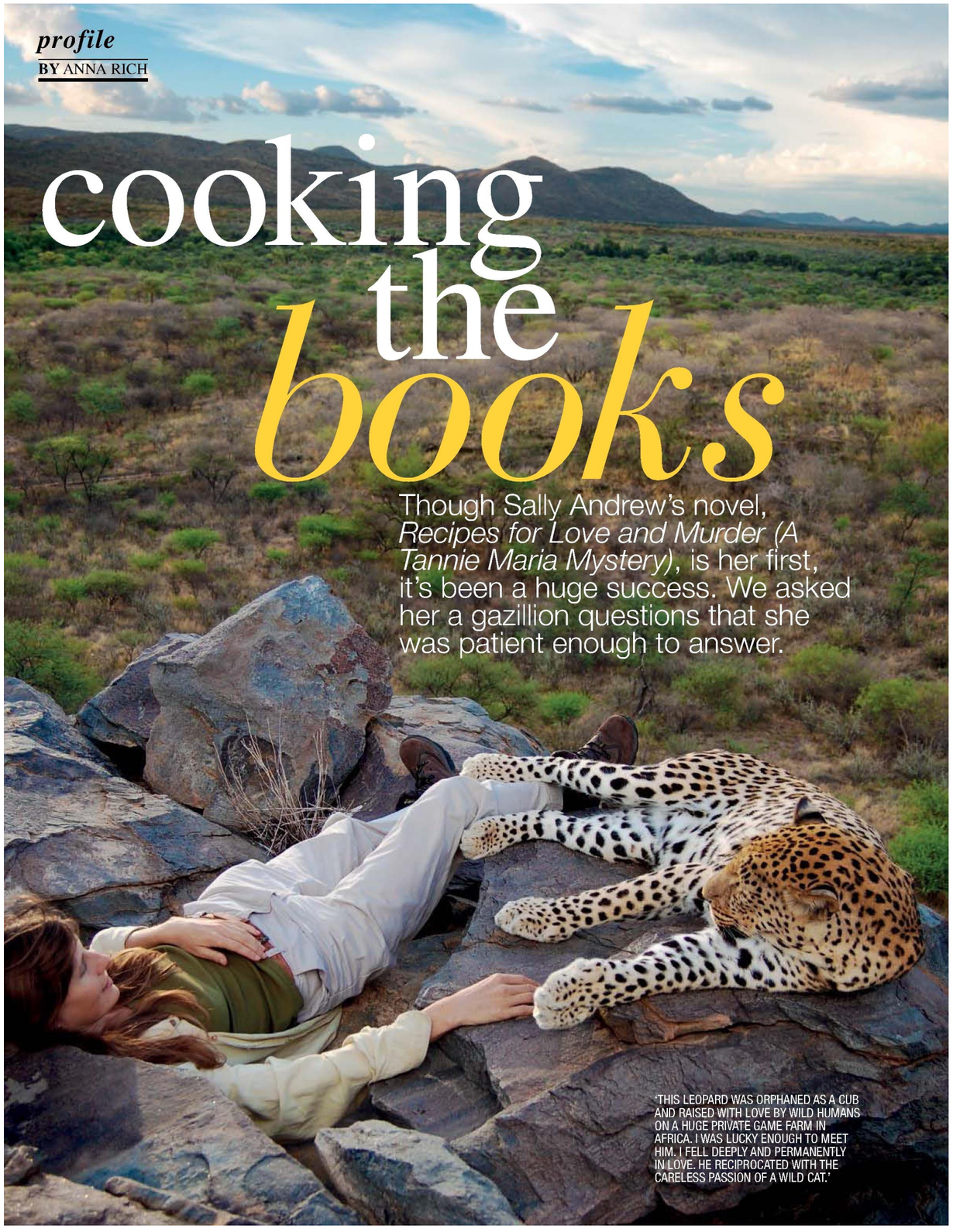
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profile

BY ANNA RICH

cooking the books

Though Sally Andrew's novel, *Recipes for Love and Murder (A Tannie Maria Mystery)*, is her first, it's been a huge success. We asked her a gazillion questions that she was patient enough to answer.

'THIS LEOPARD WAS ORPHANED AS A CUB AND RAISED WITH LOVE BY WILD HUMANS ON A HUGE PRIVATE GAME FARM IN AFRICA. I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO MEET HIM. I FELL DEEPLY AND PERMANENTLY IN LOVE. HE RECIPROCATED WITH THE CARELESS PASSION OF A WILD CAT.'



AT ONE WITH THE AFRICAN WILDERNESS: UNDER A STAR CHESTNUT TREE IN BOTSWANA AND NEXT TO A GWARRIE TREE IN THE KAROO (BELOW).



Have you always wanted to write?
I have always enjoyed writing. However, my notion of what I'm going to be when I grow up has been a shifting thing. But now at last, I know. I am home.

Will Tannie Maria be back again and again, much like Alexander McCall Smith's Mma Ramotswe?
Definitely.

Have you tried Tannie Maria's recipes yourself? How much of a cook are you – is the tomato bredie yours?
Yes. All have been tested by professional cooks and tasted by me. I only included moan-out-loud delicious recipes. I am an impatient and careless cook, but can rustle up a few yummy meals. I am not in Tannie Maria's league and, until researching this book, I never read recipe books – who wants to read when you're hungry and have supper to make?

Where did you get the idea of folding recipes into the plot?
Jirre, I am not sure. It was not a major part of my original plan (which was more focused on love and murder than recipes). I think it was something that the character Tannie Maria insisted on. I did have the idea of her being an agony aunt columnist, and she brought in the recipes as part of her advice. Perhaps I am possessed by the spook of all the food-loving *tannies* that used to live in the farmhouse where I am now staying.

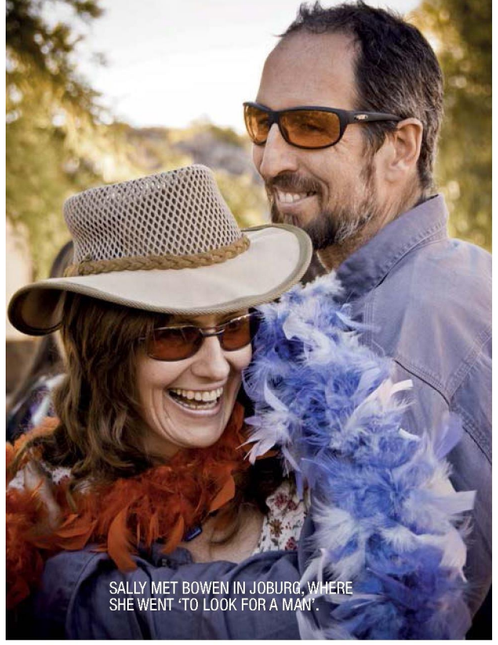
Which writers influenced you – you've mentioned Herman Charles Bosman, Agatha Christie and Alexander McCall Smith before?
I love old-fashioned cosy mysteries like those written by Agatha Christie and Erle Stanley Gardner. Also, I enjoy the slow-moving feel-good style of Bosman and McCall Smith. Related to your previous question, I was also influenced by Andrea Camilleri and Janet Evanovich, who showed me that food (by engaging the senses) helps transport the reader.

Some writers advise wannabes never to show anyone their manuscript until it's done. It seems you've done it differently, with many people giving input. How substantially did they affect your novel?
I did most of my sharing only after I had done 10 drafts of the novel myself. Except for rare exceptions, I think it's best not to show your manuscript to others until the clay has hardened. The editorial feedback I had was extremely helpful. It helped me develop my skills as a writer, and helped shape the book so that it was more easily 'marketable'.

You mention joining the New York Gotham Writers' Workshop – did you do this when you decided to write your novel? Or had you made substantial progress first?
I had written about 30 chapters. This falls under the 'rare exceptions' mentioned above.

How did you enlist the help of Carole Buggé of the Workshop and Christopher Hope?
Carole is a professional editor and I paid her. I attended a writing workshop of Christopher's, and he is very kind to his students.

At what point did you get literary agent Isobel Dixon on board? Had your novel already been published by Umuzi?
Umuzi was keen to publish. I connected with Isobel just before the Frankfurt Book Fair and she took


SALLY MET BOWEN IN JOBURG, WHERE SHE WENT 'TO LOOK FOR A MAN'.

me on board in time to finalise my contract with Umuzi, as well as make new contracts with other publishers.

Your novel is being published in 17 countries (at last count) – how does that feel?
Jirre jinne, it feels amazing. I am happy. Very happy. But I also find it hard to believe. I keep pinching myself and not waking up.

Did you have any input on the various cover designs?
Yes. My opinion is asked, but the publishers are the experts in this department. I do the word stuff.

Have you had to do many interviews and appearances at book fairs and literary events yet? You've had book launches at Kalk Bay Books and The Book Lounge – does being in the spotlight make you nervous? Given the red* vellies *you wore, is your choice of footwear generally in line with Tannie Maria's?
Not many yet. I'm very nervous beforehand, and afterwards I don't sleep a wink. But when I'm up there, in the spotlight, I seem to be just fine. For 95 percent of my life I am very happy to hide away under a gwarrie tree in the Karoo. But I think the remaining five percent of me is a closet rock star. Hence the red *vellies*. Ja, I share a love of the footwear with Tannie M, but she wears more modest colours.

Does your instant success make it difficult to contemplate writing another novel? (Or are you well on your way?)
As Margie Orford says, it takes 10 years to become an instant success. I am almost done with book two (luckily it was well underway before the success arrived).

How long did it take you to write* Recipes for Love and Murder*? Do you sit down to write for set hours, or do you write when you're feeling particularly creative?
About three or four years (in between other work). Set hours are the only way; no professional writer can wait for a muse. But perhaps because I always have to fight to carve out those writing hours, I usually make good use of them. As Barbara Kingsolver said, writer's block is for people who don't have kids. (I don't have kids, but I do have lots of other squawking demands.)

In your acknowledgements, you say Sis' Nono Silimela embodies Tannie Maria's do-the-right-thing spirit. Tell us a bit more about her.
I first met Sis' Nono when I did some work with the South African Domestic Workers Union drama group. Among other things, we shared a love of toyi-toying, and in fact any form of uninhibited singing and dancing. She is both a revolutionary and a conservative Xhosa mama. She loves parties, and taught me about ceremony (and how to make *umqombothi* for my own *umcimbi*). She reminds me that the ties we have with the people that matter to us (be they family, friends or comrades) are like a rope that binds us to life itself.

You use so many particularly South African words. Don't you worry that this aspect of your novel will be lost in translation?
I do look at the use of Afrikaans and South Africanisms quite carefully and I try to ensure that the meaning and flavour is carried in the sentence as a whole, even if the word might not be directly understood. Most of the translators into other languages are leaving the Afrikaans words as is, and using a glossary.

If your parents were coming over for supper, which of Tannie Maria's recipes would you dish up for them?
I am a lazy cook; I always go to them for supper. My dad would prepare Reghardt's bobotie (which is based on his mother's recipe). I would bring the pudding. I'd make the mango sorbet myself, but would pay someone else to make the chocolate mousse cake.

What books are by your bedside?
Beryl Markham's *West with the Night,* A.A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh,* Barbara Kingsolver's *High Tide in Tucson,* Anthony Osler's *Zen Dust*, Jeanette Winterson's *The World and Other Places*.

Top five books of all time?
Can't decide. I'm bound to forget the most important one. The ones by my bed are pretty damn good.

Favourite TV series?
I don't watch TV. But the series I enjoy on DVD include *Sherlock Holmes* and *The Big Bang Theory*.

Favourite savoury dish? Sweet one?
Mutton curry. Cheesecake (I am eating exactly that tonight).

Describe a perfect day…

In the Karoo: bench-sitting, qigong, hours of uninterrupted writing on my novel, one hour writing on my bench-sitting book. Admin emails with only good news requiring short answers. A long walk. Swim in a stream pool. Yummy meals. Dinner with friends; laughing till my stomach hurts. Dancing and bedding with my man Bowen.

What do you and Bowen have in common?
A love of the African wilderness, the Karoo, camping, dance, each other, creativity (he is an artist). And a capacity to worry about small things.

Where did you meet?
In Joburg. I went up there to look for a man. I heard the male/female ratio was much better than in Cape Town.

Did you build your mud-brick house yourselves?
We did some renovations ourselves (with the help of a small team of men). Bowen is busy building us workrooms and guestrooms. Exquisite shapes – Karoo Gaudi.

If your house was burning down, what would you save?
My house.

How do you nurture your creativity? Uninterrupted time to work. And uninterrupted time to not work (best filled by walking and splashing in stream pools).

What place you've travelled to do you love best?
Makgadikgadi Pans, Botswana.

What is your favourite tree?
The giant mama baobab on Kubu Island, Makgadikgadi Pans.

Best hike?
My current best hike is here in the Karoo: down along the animal path to what I call the Giraffe Pools (because I often see them or their tracks there). Then I walk up along the stream, dipping in the pools, lying on the rocks and eating my picnic.

Prettiest waterfall?
Victoria Falls blows me away.

What skill do you most admire?
Making people laugh.

Favourite music?
Leonard Cohen and Dave Ferguson.

What is your happiest childhood memory?
Swimming in our pool.

Worst childhood memory?
My hair going green (something to do with the chlorine).

What's your favourite thing about each of your parents?
The fact that they are both still alive and full of love.My mother's enthusiasm. My dad's philosophies.

Best subject at school?
Xhosa.

Is your work as a social and environmental activist over now?
I can't say. I got burned out the way I was doing things; perhaps I will find other forms of activism.

What kinds of things did you do as an activist?
Sjoe. At nine years old I was marching to the headmaster in solidarity with the youth shot by the police in 1976. At 19, I was toyi-toying with the youth (towards police who shot at us). At 29, I was involved with the Detainees' Parents Support Committee, and wrote a book about the abuse of women. At 39, I wrote a book on climate change. And then there was all sorts of stuff in between. To summarise in academic terms: I have been engaged in a number of gender, class, race and environmental struggles.

Greatest fear now?
Not making my deadlines.

When last did you cry? Why?
A few months ago. The flanks of Muizenberg mountain – and beyond – were badly burned.

What makes you angry?
Cruelty and carelessness that damage people and the earth.

What do you live by?
Be gentle with yourself. Try to do the right thing.

What don't you like to talk about?
I'm not going to tell you that, am I?

Do you like Twitter? And Facebook?
Did you hear that Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were merging into one company? You Twitface. I struggle to keep up with my handful of real-life friends, let alone FB friends. Reception is bad here on our nature reserve, so although I get some FB notifications on my BlackBerry, I often can't respond, which is frustrating (and feels rude). Twitter is better (though reception's still tricky, it's less interactive). I enjoy the editing involved in reducing a lot of blahblah to a single short tweet.

What's your biggest problem at the moment? Don't say answering these questions. ;-)
Learning to relax under the pressure of multiple demands and deadlines.

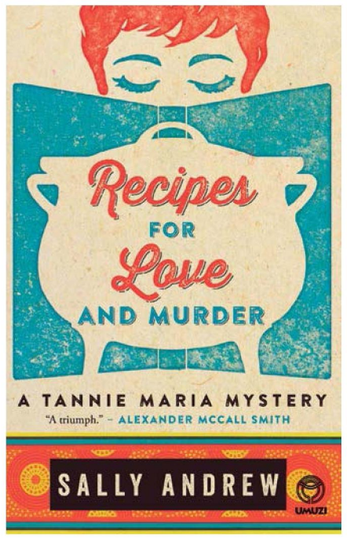
How do you plan to celebrate your next birthday?
If I can't do my perfect day (described earlier), then I'd settle for being in New York to launch my second novel in the Tannie Maria series: *The Satanic Mechanic.*

PHOTOGRAPHS: BOWEN BOSHIER, ANDREA NIXON, WWW.SALLYANDREW.COM

book extract

RECIPES FOR LOVE AND MURDER

(A Tannie Maria Mystery) by Sally Andrew (Umuzi)



CHAPTER TWO

Now I'm not one to rush into bad news, so I helped myself to more tea and milk tart. Hattie was still drinking her first cup of tea, looking miserable. The envelope just sat there, full of its bad news.

'It's from Head Office,' she said, running her hand over a bump in her throat. Maybe the air she had swallowed had got stuck there.

Hattie didn't often hear from Head Office. But when she did it was to tell her what to do. The gazettes are watchamacallit, syndicated. Each gazette is independent, and has to raise most of its own funds through advertising, but they must still follow the Head Office rules.

The shrike dived from the branch of the sweet-thorn tree down onto the ground.

'Maria, they say we absolutely must have an advice column,' she said.

I frowned at her. What was all the fuss about?

'Like an agony aunt column,' she said. 'Advice about love and such. They say it increases sales.'

'Ja. It might,' I said.

I was still waiting for the bad news.

'We just don't have the space. Or the funds to print the four extra pages that we'll need to add one column.' She held her hands like a book. I knew how it worked. Four pages were printed back to back on one big sheet. 'I've tried to rework the layout. I've tried to see what we can leave out. But there's nothing. Just nothing.'

I shifted in my chair. The shrike flew back up to a branch with something it had caught.

'I phoned them on Friday,' said Hattie, 'to tell them. Sorry we just can't do it, not right now, I said.' Her throat became all squeezed like a plastic straw. 'They said we can cut out the recipe column.'

Her voice sounded far away. I was watching the shrike; it had a lizard in its beak. It stabbed its meat onto a big white thorn.

'Tannie Maria.'

Was the lizard still alive, I wondered?

'I argued, told them how much the readers adored your column. But they said the advice column was non-negotiable.'

Was the butcher bird going to leave the meat out to dry, and make biltong?

'Tannie Maria.'

I looked at her. Her face looked so tight and miserable – as if her life was going to pot, instead of mine. That recipe column was my life. Not just the money. Yes, I needed the extra food money; the pension I got after my husband's death was small. But the column was how I shared what was most important to me: my cooking.

My throat felt dry. I drank some tea.

'But I've been thinking,' Hattie said. 'You could write the advice column. Give advice about love and such.'

I snorted. It was not a pretty sound.

'I know nothing about love,' I said.

Just then one of my chickens, the hen with the dark feathers around her neck, walked across the lawn, pecking at the ground, and I did feel a kind of love for her. I loved the taste of my melktert and the smell of rusks baking and the sound of the rain when it came after the long wait. And love was an ingredient in everything I cooked. But advice columns were not about melktert or chickenlove.

'Not that kind of love, anyway,' I said. 'And I'm not one to give advice. You should ask someone like Tannie Gouws who works at CBL Hardware. She always has advice for everyone.'

'One of the marvellous things about you, Maria, is you never give unsolicited advice. But you are a superb listener. You're the one we come to when there's anything important to discuss. Remember how you helped Jessie when she couldn't decide whether to go and work in Cape Town?'

'I remember giving her koeksisters…'

'You listened to her and gave her excellent advice. Thanks to you, she is still here with us.'

I shook my head and said, 'I still think it was the koeksisters.'

'I had another idea,' Hattie said. 'Why don't you write a cookbook? *Tannie Maria's Recipes*. Maybe I can help you find a publisher.'

I heard a whirring sound and I looked up to see the shrike flying away. Leaving the lizard on the thorn.

A book wasn't a bad idea, really, but the words that came from my mouth were: 'It's lonely to write a book.'

She reached out to take my hand. But my hand just lay there.

'Oh, Tannie Maria,' she said. 'I'm so sorry.'

Hattie was a good friend. I didn't want to make her suffer. I gave her hand a squeeze.

'Eat some melktert, Hats,' I said. 'It's a good one.'

She picked up her fork and I helped myself to another slice. I didn't want to suffer either. I had no reason to feel lonely. I was sitting on my stoep with a lovely view of the veld, a good friend and some first-class milk tart.

'How about,' I said, 'I read people's letters and give them a recipe that will help them?'

Hattie finished her mouthful before she spoke. 'You'd need to give them some advice.'

'Food advice,' I said.

'They'll be writing in with their problems.'

'Different recipes for different problems.'

Hattie stabbed the air with her fork, and said, 'Food as medicine for the body and heart.'

'Ja, exactly.'

'You'll have to give some advice, but a recipe could be part of it.'

'Tannie Maria's Love Advice and Recipe Column.'

Hattie smiled and her face was her own again. 'Goodness gracious, Tannie Maria. I don't see why not.'

Then she used the fork to polish off her melktert.

CHAPTER THREE

So it was on the stoep with Hattie that we decided on Tannie Maria's Love Advice and Recipe Column. The column was very popular. A lot of people from all over the Klein Karoo wrote to me. The letters I wrote back gave me the recipes for this book: recipes for love and murder. So here I am, writing a recipe book after all. Not the kind I thought I'd write, but anyway.

One thing led to another in ways I did not expect. But let me not tell the story all upside-down; I just want to give you a taste…

The main recipe in this book is the recipe for murder. The love recipe is more complicated, but in a funny way it came out of this murder recipe:

RECIPE FOR MURDER

1 stocky man who abuses his wife
1 small tender wife
1 medium-sized tough woman in love with the wife
1 double-barrelled shotgun
1 small Karoo town marinated in secrets
3 bottles of Klipdrift brandy
3 little ducks
1 bottle of pomegranate juice
1 handful of chilli peppers
1 mild gardener
1 fire poker
1 red-hot New Yorker
7 Seventh-day Adventists (prepared for The End of the World)
1 hard-boiled investigative journalist
1 soft amateur detective
2 cool policemen
1 lamb
1 handful of red herrings and suspects mixed together
Pinch of greed

• Throw all the ingredients into a big pot and simmer slowly, stirring with a wooden spoon for a few years. Add the ducks, chillies and brandy towards the end and turn up the heat.

TANNIE KURUMAN'S MELKTERT

CRUST
1 1/4 cups cake flour
1/3 cup icing sugar
1/4 t salt
1/2 cup cubed butter (125g), softened
2 egg yolks

• Sift the flour, icing sugar and salt together.
• Add the butter and egg yolks and cut into the flour with a knife. Using your fingers, knead very gently until the butter is mixed in. Wrap the dough in cling film and leave to rest for 30 minutes in the fridge.
• Roll out the dough on a floured surface and fit into a well-greased 24cm pie dish.
• Prick the base with a fork.
• Bake for 15–20 minutes at 200°C.

FILLING
INGREDIENTS A
2 cups milk
1 T butter
Pinch of salt
2/3 cup sugar

INGREDIENTS B
1 cup milk
2 T cake flour
1/4 cup corn starch

INGREDIENTS C
2 eggs
1 t vanilla extract

TOPPING
Cinnamon sugar

• Heat ingredients A (2 cups milk, butter, salt and sugar) in a saucepan, stirring until the sugar has dissolved.
• Mix ingredients B (1 cup milk, flour and corn starch) in a bowl, and pour A onto B. Mix well and return to the saucepan.
• Cook the mixture, stirring all the time, for about 5 minutes until it has thickened and the floury taste has gone.
• Beat ingredients C (eggs and vanilla extract) in a bowl. Slowly whisk the hot mixture into C and mix well. Return to the saucepan and cook gently until thick (2–3 minutes).
• Pour the custard into the baked pastry crust and let it cool and set. Sprinkle on lots of cinnamon sugar before serving. ✤