In F Scott Fitzgerald's novel, The Great Gatsby, one of the pastimes of the indulgent rich was prolonged conversation on "The Best of Everything and Anything." Of course this was possible because in the thirties there was no television - the nemesis of banter and conversation between family and friends.

In subsequent years, the Best of Everything was extended by newspapers and magazines to annual polls on Jazz, restaurants, the worst dressed, the rich and famous, MVPs and today's popular Sports Illustrated swimsuit issues.

In recording my Nostalgias I have always cherished the idea of sharing my best - titillating your palette to simultaneously evoke your best for comparison, especially since we may have been in the same church - different pews, different times - but all on the same heady, wonderful journey of life in 'O Beautiful Guyana' of yesteryear.

**Mauby**

Mauby: Guyana's pint, not as potent as creek water, which after a meal of labba, will ensure you return some day, to the Mudland, despite the sensational mayhem. Derived from a bark with no claim to aphrodisiac potency like capadulla - there's that old Chinese cookshop excuse given to the calypsonian who complained to the Chinese cook that every time he forked the low mein meat it yelped like a 'dog.' The cook assured him that what he was hearing was the mauby 'bark.'

Every Guyanese has their favourite mauby shop, and I am convinced that everyone's best was the mauby from the cake shop at the corner where they lived. Blending mauby is not rocket science. Pour the boiled concentrate into water, add sugar - preferably brown - and stir vigorously. It's an old wives' tale that you must have old mauby to blend a new batch - add spices, and leave in the sun to percolate.

As quality is not the main criterion, then it's quantity, and who can beat a large glass of Chuck-A-Sang's mauby (Murray - now Quamina and Cummings Sts) - 2 cents in 1945. Runner-up would be in the early fifties, Mount Eagle (Camp and Regent Sts) after games on Thomas Lands.

Lest my locations are queried, there was a Mount Eagle at Wellington St and North Rd, 1950, opposite the Chinese Temple Lodge.

Southside, across the street, was DeRyck's lemonade in the marble bottles, which mixed with mauby equalled any shandy, or better, cream soda and Carnation milk.
Recently, I paid US$0.50 in Orlando, Florida, for a medium glass of Mauby that had enough ice to sink the Titanic.

**Black pudding**

Black pudding: Guyana's weekend gourmet dish, better than Scottish haggis, but then they don't add married-man pork. My first encounter with this delicacy was around 1944. Jimmy's in Robb Street was the best during WWII, when my father, ordering the family quota, accepted 'hot,' expecting hot off the fire. As the eldest son, I received the first taste. Tongues of fire seared thru' my ears like the Savoy 1947 fire. My eyes popped out of their sockets; my kisser singed like a branded Rupununi heifer; my nose felt like I had sneezed Drano and worse - pepper burns, both ways.

Betty entrenched herself as the BP Queen beginning in the early fifties from a bottom house (Regent St, west of Bourda Market and the Employment Exchange). She had far more customers than her neighbour Lyken's on Norton St, and was still the best on Regent St, Bourda, in the eighties.

Her Maws was a Kaieteur delight, and my only complaint was her assistant Ralph, whose servings of the companion souse was as meagre as 'the 'ol lady's in the shoe.' He must have come from a large family.

Mrs Subryan on Church St offered home-made standard, comparable to my mother's. Another BP delight was the vendor with huge bandaged legs outside the rum shop at Robb and Cummings Sts - sold out before the six o'clock bee. Her addition of a final dab of oil with a wafted feather to the sliced portions was Japanese fan-dance artistry.

Of course, every Guyanese mother is their children's best cook, no matter how far they wander from home, and young brides today offer no challenge. I am convinced that this is the reason for the current high divorce rate.

**Chinese food**

Chinese food: Without specifying any special Chinese dish, and having eaten in every Chinese cookshop from Skeldon to Morawhanna, my unchallenged best would be Sheila's on America St in the fifties. Scrubbed tables for eating - tablecloth as foreign as the Black Watch of the sixties - in a real down-to-earth market setting. The only stars they would have received from AAA would be for the $1.25 mixed low mein, wanton soup or eddoe duck every Sunday. The crispy Char Siu Pork - a gastronomical delight that could have earned Guyana a world title in any culinary Olympics 50 years before Six Head Lewis.

The National on Robb St was the popular best in the seventies and is still a favourite export to Canada - ask the Guyanese in Toronto. Yong Hing's Chinatown, and later the Bamboo Gardens as well as the Orient above Bostwick's Drug Store, were guaranteed tasty Oriental food for
entertaining, or back-up when the family stove 'na wuk.' Chinese restaurants are today as popular and proliferate as much as Peter Taylor's Town Talk political gossip column in the seventies.

**Chicken in the rough**

Chicken in the rough: Deep-fried chicken in a basket, with a variety of extras on the side that varied according to the buy local - can't get - need to substitute for the basic customary French fries.

Oasis, at Robb and King St, set the standard and allegedly introduced the basket serving.

Sip and Chat, Rendezvous, Brown Betty, Farm Fresh, were consistently good quality, worthy to carry home, as appeasing offers and excuses to waiting spouses for staying out late with the boys.

Always wondered, if the baskets, were a distinct Guyanese marketing first, but the finger bowl after the chicken entre, was certainly an effort to elevate local table manners and etiquette.

Celebrating a Wight Cup Cricket win at Palm Court in the early sixties, one of my Cosmos teammates earned his lifelong nickname 'Shun' when he sipped the finger bowl, and complained "the shun needed more salt." Demico's chicken, which was Colonel Saunders' recipe, was also excellent.

**Pastries**

Pastries: The Nook at D'Urban and Camp Sts made the best patties in Georgetown, the best pine tarts being found at Mrs Ransome's (6 cents in 1952) at Middle and Camp St. Castro obliquely opposite had also a delicious wide variety of pastry and black pudding; while Ferraz at Murray and Main Sts offered the best peanut punch, tennis roll and cheese. This Ferraz introduced cracker jack and bubble gum to British Guiana in the war years. In the late seventies, this parlour became a Demico/DIH takeaway - the Arapaima. Simultaneously the Arawak Steak House at D'Aguiar's Ice House, Stabroek Square, offered a high quality succulent juicy prime steak, while downstairs at the Brickdam front, newly introduced pizza and Demico ice cream pleased both customers as well as shareholders. Tang's bread was king, Harlequin's, Sadler's and Wally Fung's were close runners-up.

Editor’s Update Note: Ferraz on the corner of Main and what was then Murray Street, was bought by Banks DIH, which opened the Arapaima restaurant there. The old wooden building upstairs was left intact until 2004, when Banks pulled down the entire structure and erected the current Quik- Serve Restaurant.
Roti and curry

Indian dishes: Unlike neighbouring Trinidad (and the wide varieties of curries in St James, Port of Spain) roti and curry never caught on yesteryear with local Guyanese. Perhaps Guyanese preferred home-cooked curries, but did not like to clap the hot roti. No wonder the roti and dhal-phouri from Shanta's, at New Market and Camp Sts, was a daily sell-out.

While the favourite of Trinis was 'doubles,' the Guyanese best-seller was a dhal phourie with potato ball and bilimbi (sourie).

NB For the young ones, before cinemas become as extinct as the railways, doubles may also refer to the marathon five-hour two movies that 'big-eye' Guyanese demanded.

Channa Man Singh, at D'urban and Camp Sts (opposite the jail) was the local oasis for family nibbles of boiled channa, parched nuts, candy floss and popcorn - a natural fill-up on the way to the cinema. I must recognize here the pit cinema vendors who offered phouri/philourie and potato balls with sourie pepper. I often marvelled at their ingenuity to offer egg balls when English potatoes were banned, and their substitute of black-eye peas for boiled channa, which was called 'channa balls.'

Crab backs

Crab backs: Yet another distinct Guyanese delectable called crabcakes in the northern hemisphere, Guyana's mud crabs are more delicious than the blue, snow or Alaskan crabs popular abroad.

Never mind the pared down crab shells, as the crab meat was what counted. Bookers Universal Snackette and Tang's Bakery was the place to 'pig out' on crab backs under 25 cents in the sixties. Or better, the Crab Back King at Charlotte and Cummings Sts offered a half-gallon Brown Betty plastic ice cream container with crab meat for $25. You couldn't recognize the grouper fish mixed in between.

Have you ever noticed that fish was never popular eat-out fare in Guyana, in contrast to the seafood restaurants abroad.

A good fried fish (banga mary) at every train station on the coast went out of style like seersucker when the coastline trains were closed, and one had to go to Fereira's in Barr St, Kitty, for delectable shark and bread in the late sixties. Wiri-wiri pepper is the best in the world, but then bird pepper is free.

Bar-B-Que

Bar-B-Q: Guyana's best fundraiser, and probably our best entertainment value since that fireworks display on BGCC around 1945. Pyrotechnics to match our Republic celebrations, the
Brooklyn Bridge centennial, or Monaco’s annual competition. Four cents got me into the ground to be in front of the action like a shirt button. For $10 we could fete at Thirst Park, Milton Low’s in Belvoir Court or John Fernandes in Subryanville, and enjoy a brass/string or steel band, and sneak in your flask, if you were not a Banks fan.

The venue/music and liquor covered, the next criterion for best Bar-B-Q would be the chicken itself. A quarter chicken was expected, and anything less would create more grumble than the recent VAT.

Christiani on Waterloo originated the Bar-B-Q trend, but I have to give Bunny Fernandes and his gang my best award for consistent tastiness and cooking. The pre-washed chicken was dipped in his secret formula of a boiled marinate of vinegar, herbs and spices; cooked on raging pit fires as the oil and ketchup basting dripped and reignited the coals; and continuously doused with standby hose, adding flavour to the offerings.

The secret, of course, was to place the barbeque pits upwind, so that the smoked aroma helped oversights and excuses for the paltry side dishes, whether potato salad or plantain chips. The Lions’ dedicated volunteer wives offered home-made standards of barbeque for fundraisers at their functions.

As a loyal, true barbeque enthusiast, my nightmare stories of Bar-B-Q fiascos would make Edgar Allan Poe’s stories unfit for the local TV tripe. In 1962, Old Year’s night, the rain fell non-stop from around 8.00 pm until 5.00am the next morning. I remember this distinctly as my neighbour rode to the Chinese laundry on Broad St to pick up his suit and returned home at 5 am. He still insisted that his wife, dress and they go out, so he could impress his neighbours with what a great time he had on the town.

Our party drove to Pilot Hick’s revels in Kitty - more rain than Noah’s deluge; the Bar-B-Q served was floating like dumpling in soup, so you flipped your plate to get rid of the water while eating.

On another occasion at the sea wall, the dam damp coals won’t light for hell. Can you imagine 500 partying Guyanese leaving the fete with a raw piece of chicken quarter hanging from the drum stick? (There was no foil or paper available). A partner of mine spent the rest of his life explaining to his stay-home wife about the two quarters of raw chicken she found under the car seat three weeks later. First occasion in recorded history the chicken spilled the beans!

**Watering holes**

Watering hole: Guyanese stop-off on Friday's payday afternoon for a toock or tupps, and to reduce the wife's weekly house money. Demico was a favourite, offering pool tables, while Russian Bear, Houston's and Old Demerara White on Light St were always filled to capacity.

JP Santos’s blend of a rum called 'Tarzan' was guaranteed to have everyone in an Irish fighting, brawling mood after two drinks, and you awakened next day feeling you were Tomahawk-
scalped. The fun in drinking was the unlimited excuse to be cantankerous and 'beat up' the innocent at home!

Pac-pac was the generic name for fruit wines from Sue-A-Quan, Robb St, and Correia's, Durban St, and this name usually included fire-water - local bush rum.

After sixty years, Palm Court is still the best oasis to meet everyone socially in Georgetown, while after twelve midnight, you may 'maco' and identify their cars parked from the Groyne to Carib Point, to Half Way Inn, E B. (The best parking spot - 'public bedroom' will be a future 'R' rated Nostalgia.)

**Ice cream and ices**

Ice cream would be a toss-up between Demico and Sterling in the seventies, and this was only because Brown Betty's, after 40-odd years had become too frothy. Brown Betty introduced the popsicle, fudgsicle and creamsicle in the late forties, and before the 1945 Booker's Black Friday, was on Hincks St, the local Mel's Diner with a great milk shake and egg sandwich (18 cents). After Nifty's Soda Fountain in the late fifties, Freezer Fresh on Camp St in the old Shu-All premises was another ice palace delight. Cyril's Garage on Thomas St made all the cone cups then.

**Fairs and bazaars**

Like barbecues, fairs have always been the main source of revenue for schools and charities. The biggest and best was the Annual League of Coloured People's Fair, in the Promenade Gardens, which promoted and encouraged local products before the 'buy local' awareness after Independence. The Agricultural/Livestock Exhibition to honour Princess Margaret's visit in 1958 at Mon Repos was our best showcase of local husbandry and agriculture.

YMCA's annual May Day Fair, Thomas Lands, with the plaiting of the Maypole was a must, as well as St Joseph's S Misericordia colourful tribute to the countries of the world. The International Bar at Colgrain House was a sophisticated high-class rum shop offering the best duty free liquor with international cuisine to support the local Red Cross and other deserving charities. It was a pleasure witnessing the various consulates competing to offer the best of their homeland entertainment in an atmosphere of non-professional friendly rivalry. No cold wars, but ice-cold vodkas, French wines, saki and German beer. Ethnically, the Chinese had their Chinatown fair, while the East Indians held lavish Diwali fairs and sari contests with tassa drums. Dorcas Club and YWCA (Brickdam), plus the Ursuline Convent and St Rose's also had grand fairs.

**Dancing and disco**

Prior to 1945, the Assembly Rooms was the Mecca for social dancing, and in the fifties, you graduated and achieved the rites of dance when you frolicked at the Carib with its magnificent
starry roof decor.

Seasonally, the traditional places to dance for the Xmas holidays were at the Portuguese Club, Xmas Night; Chinese SC with Tom Charles and his Syncopators on Old Year’s night; and East Indians, Camp St for Mandalee - Twelfth Night.

Of course, the enjoyment of the December pre-Xmas partying depended on how many staff parties you attended. Between the financial banks/insurance companies/several sections of Banks DIH, culminating with Bookers Universal staff party after Xmas stocktaking on the Universal roof or Mariner’s Club, you needed a party rest before Valentine, and later, Mash, Feb 23. Guyanese always knew how to fete like Vikings.

**Cook-up**

After midnight, hungry Georgetown night owls would accept any cook-up as the best, and it was a question of your location while prowling. Only ‘fowls’ went to bed before 8 pm, and like the nocturnal Dracula, only sunrise forced us home.

Hunte and Pemya’s cook-up were consistently gourmet, and their sites at Bourda Market, Regent and King Sts, and the law courts always had a standing patronage.

I am convinced that the sanitary quick wash of the eating utensils in two buckets of water - swish-swish and a shake dry - contributed immensely to our immunity against disease, and strengthened our endurance systems.

**Best transportation**

Naturally the best and least expensive was to walk, and yesteryear, the middle-class Cadillac was a Raleigh, Humber or Rudge Bicycle ($95). Towing maxed with five, before the frame bent or tire burst.

Baker shop/grocery deliveries were by carrier bikes, accommodating huge pannier baskets in front. Draycarts were the lifeblood of our commerce and local market trade.