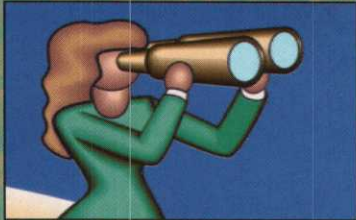


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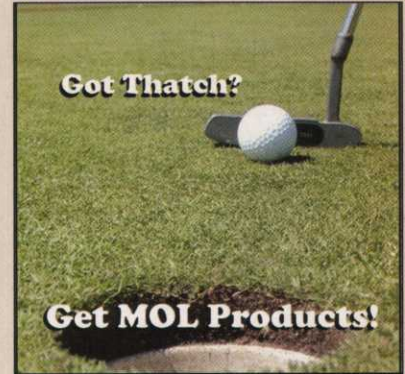
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ramen noodles

Nearly 50 years later, the directions remain impossibly simple — boil water, cook for three minutes, add flavor pouch, stir, eat.

As anyone who has ever been a poor college student, a lazy bachelor or just a plain bad cook knows, we speak of Ramen Noodles. But for all the folks who take a yearly dive into either the packet form or the bowl form of the noodles, only a few know the name of Momofuku Ando, who died Jan. 5 at the age of 96.

Ando, you see, invented the cost-conscious culinary delicacy, and his story deserves to be told. In 1948 Ando was tossed into a Japanese jail for tax evasion, though he said he gave the unreported money to students for scholarships — how ironic, since they would later become a large part of his empire. After two years in the clink, Ando tried and tried to become successful in business.

In post-war Japan, food shortages were a major problem, and Ando, seeing endless lines at noodle stands, wanted to find a way to get more food to more people. After failure upon failure, Ando eventually figured out — in a backyard workshop in 1958 — that flash-frying noodles with palm oil could make a quick, easy, and, eventually, super cheap meal. Of course, he didn't

THE NEAR-MIRACLE MEAL
SUSTAINS BILLIONS EACH YEAR
AND PROVES EVERYBODY LOVES
RAMEN **BY MARK LUCE**

know that the invention would lead to a company that darn near printed its own money — a profit of \$317 million last year — nor to a sprawling museum dedicated to instant noodles in Ikeda City, Japan.

Not one to rest on said laurels, in 1972 Ando took those noodles and squeezed them into a Styrofoam cup, making an already simple-to-make meal even easier with Cup Noodles. And with that invention, foreign sales boomed.

While I do sometimes have a palate that craves foie gras, fine steak and finer scotch, I can honestly say that I always enjoy Ramen — even back in the cashless days when I ate it out of necessity rather than desire.

My dear aunt, I'm sure partially as a joke and partially looking out for my survival, gave me the cookbook, "101 Ways to Cook Ramen Noodles," when I moved into my own apartment. I was less than thrilled, thinking it a gag on my perpetual poorness — until I actu-



ally tried a recipe that called for dicing up celery with the noodles. The crunch of the celery coupled with the pliability of the Ramen created a moment of ying-yang enlightenment. Then I tried sprinkles of carrots (cheap), scallions (cheaper) and soy sauce (really cheap).

Even though I don't have to eat Ramen anymore, I still make sure to keep a few packages around — mostly for when my dearest Jen is gone. She can't figure out why I always drain the broth (I want noodles, not soup), nor will she layer in Wasabi for tangy Ramen. But when forced to fend for myself, I inevitably return that which comforts — a turkey sandwich and a bowl of steaming noodles.

Thank you, Mr. Ando, for that simple pleasure.

Mark Luce lives in Kansas City, Mo., where his newest favorite Ramen flavor is creamy chicken.

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