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## The Cos' célèbre \*

By MARK GILCHRIST

This week, our conversational couple is enjoying traditional cuisine at a sidewalk restaurant in Batumi, in the Republic of Georgia. It's a beautiful, summer day here, and the topic? An ugly one that tries to rewrite history.

"Bill Cosby would be better off if he had killed himself a decade ago," he said.

"Whoa, harsh opening," she said, chopping a khinkali dumpling in half with her fork. "Besides, how would he be better off... dead...?"

"Just look at what we know about the man today..."

"That he is blind?"

"Legally..." he said, using air quotes. "Anyway, a decade ago, we knew very little about the monster Crosby."

"We loved him..."

"And today, we know a lot more, right?" he said, taking a large bite off of a lamb kabob, about as long as his forearm. "And that has terribly affected his family and descendants. Can you imagine if you knew that your grandfather..."

He put the kabob — what we call a "gyro," with finely-chopped meat, sumac, onions and a sour-cream-type sauce — on his plate and eyed other foods on the table.

"Okay, okay," she said, dipping her meat-filled dumpling into a sour yogurt and then eating half the Khinkali,

whole. "But what good would hiding it do, 'Mr. Sunlight is the best disinfectant?'"

"Oh, right, Brandeis," he said, tugging an ear off of their shared khachapuri, a bread-dish holding a lightly-cooked egg, and dipping it in the egg. "But, what if..."

"Oh good," she said. "I love your 'what if's'..."

"What if, a decade ago, he took all the money he would have spent on lawyers and payoffs and fines — well, do the math — just took a huge pile of money and donated it to domestic violence shelters or children's hospitals, and then, just said 'goodbye?'"

"Aww, we would all remember the Cos' we knew and loved; the comedian, the TV star, the philanthropist. Gotcha — charming notion."

"In a way, Cos was like J.F.K.," he said, "and..."

"Whoa, hold on, you're not comparing..."

"Well, um, I mean..."

"A philanderer and a serial rapist? Not in the same sentence."

"Right. Sorry. It was just an example of someone who died before their unsavory habits surfaced."

"Well, heck, start that list with POTUS-1."

But, surely you see what I mean.

And besides, his life has been a living hell as he has watched his victims stand and call him a perverse rapist. May I have one of your khinkali?"

"Alleged victims, and you mean my last khinkali. Sure... go ahead..."

"Well, he is the only person who really knows, if he can remember them all..."

"See, there you go..."

"As he's watched his TV shows get canceled, his partnerships divorced, honorary degrees dishonored, his life crumble — talk about a long, slow, painful death."

"All right, I guess I see where you're coming from."

"His whole Wikipedia page would be all high notes, and not the rap sheet it is today..."

"Aren't you being a little harsh?" she said. "I mean, he was convicted only of 'aggravated indecent assault.'"

"Three times," he said.

"Well..."

"See, you're referring to what has been proven in court," he said. "But, the public gets to work with a different bar."

"Okay... here comes the 'Freedom of thought' speech," she said.

"C'mon, we know much more than what he was con-



Baking Puri in Sagarejo, Republic of Georgia. This pad holds the dough as its placed on the inside wall of the oven.

victed of, just by overwhelming evidence in the public sphere," he said. "Criminal court proves a person guilty only for use in legal punishment. I'm not sending the man to jail, and the public is allowed to think on its own."

"And believe me, it will," she said.

"So, if you're going to kill him off early, like that, what happens to the victims then, who would never have the closure of being heard... in court?"

"Casualties for the common cause."

"Easy to say when you're not a casualty."

"Yes, I suppose..." he said, nearly done with his kabob, and apparently, his testimony and defense.

"So, you're done?"

"Uh, guess so..."

"Good."

"Uh-oh..."

"What?"

"I... well, I — I just got the; 'You're Done?' and then that look when you say; 'Good.' So, now I know it's your turn."

"Awww..."

"And my turn to get an earful."

"And get it good."

"Go ahead, I deserve it, I guess..."

Having finished their meal, they

went for a walk along Gogebashvili Street along the waterfront. Batumi is a rich, shipping and tourist city on the Black Sea, with beautiful sculptures, observation tower, a gondola ride and casinos — hardly typical of this country with villages on mountain ranges and in forests so remote, an American passing through might be the only American passing through for years.

They stopped and bought churchkhela, which are a candy treat of stringed walnuts dipped in a dried, thick grape sauce, sort of like lumpy candy candles, but not really.

"Yeah, Justice Brandeis was right; 'Sunlight can be the best of disinfectants...' she said, "and look at what it has cleaned here."

"A courtroom?"

"An entire generation," she said. "You know, sometimes, to let something heal, you have to rip that first bandage off and clean the wound."

"Okay..."

"Had Cosby died a decade ago, we would not have had the outrage that evolved from the revealing of the Monster Cosby."

Click HERE for photos of Georgia.



"Ali and Nino" is a "moving" statue on the Batumi waterfront.

"The repulsion, revulsion — yeah, outrage."

"Then," she said, "who knows how we might have reacted to Weinstein, Spacey and... those others."

"Are you saying that Bill Cosby is the poster child of the #METOO movement?"

"Um, well, more like the foundation it is built upon," she said, "the spark that started the fire."

"He certainly did push many people to say; 'Enough is enough.'"

"It's bizarre, but by living long enough for his past to come back to haunt him, he woke up the civilized world to some of the horrors of sexual predation."

"And there you are, just like I said. Sort of..."

And she knew that this highly-charged conversation had just ended,

with, surprisingly, no one getting hurt. They had both made valid points, and one of them, at least, was able to acknowledge that.

With the setting sun and dimming conversation, our couple stood on the waterfront, before the Ali and Nino statues, a kinetic sculpture depicting the romance of a Georgian woman and her Azerbaijani suitor, who died young while fighting the invading Russian army. The figures rotate as if in a very slow dance, and for a few seconds, they interlace with each other, forming a single figure.

She was moved by the story and the artful expression, and for a moment, she felt the urge to embrace her dinner date and watch the sun set. He tossed another walnut in the air and popped it in his mouth as if it was popcorn and he was at a circus.

\* From celebrity to célèbre, a historic transformation.

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Khachapuri, the national dish of Georgia, comes in many forms.



In the villages of Georgia, you can still pick your own chickens.



It's hard to believe that cities like Batumi, left, and the nation's capital, Tblisi, are in a country where shepherding is still a way of life.



Churchkhela, left, is a sweet treat made by dipping strung walnuts in a grape syrup. At right is a fairly typical apartment, one of thousands built in the region during Soviet rule that ended in the early 1990s.



You can tour Joseph Stalin's train car at his museum in Gori.



An operator of cable cars in Chiatura gives residents rides to and from work and school in this valley between steep mountains.



Left, the 65-foot-tall aluminum "Kartli Deda" statue, overlooking Georgia's capital of Tblisi, represents the mother of Georgians, holding in one hand, wine for approaching friends, and in the other, a sword for the country's enemies. Right, making puri, the most popular of Georgian breads, in a round hearth oven. Dough is placed on the inside oven wall by hand, and removed with a hooked skewer.



This seamstress crochets a garment between customers in her shop in Chiatura, heated by an open electric element on the floor.