

96 and Not Dead Yet: Dining Dangerously

by [Reg Green](#) (July 2025)



A few days ago, I was reading of a frightening incident that happened to Arthur Koestler, the ex-Communist author, that reminded me that but for a slip of the tongue I might have been named alongside him in that same history book. It happened when Koestler was on the run in the Spanish Civil War in 1937.

As the net closed in, he found refuge with a famed Scottish zoologist, Sir Peter Chalmers-Mitchell, who was living in

retirement in Malaga and, in his besieged villa, ate what could have been his last meal, the only food available being sardines, jam, and a fine wine. Luckily, both escaped to eat many other, and more conventional, meals.

In a small restaurant in Rome more than eighty years after that dangerous time in Spain, I pointed to an item on the menu. "What's this?" I asked the waitress. "That's spaghetti and jam," she said in her best English. "It's our speciality." I nearly gagged but when else would I get the chance to be remembered as sharing the rigors of war with the likes of Koestler, Hemingway and Orwell, all of whom had built their literary fame in Spain?

Alas, when she brought it, it was a routine plateful of spaghetti—and ham. That exasperating letter 'j,' whose pronunciation has been causing trouble since ancient Roman times, had deprived me of my place in the history books. I can think of only one appropriate curse: *Oh, Jell!*

PS On second thought, it could have been worse. I often think of the migrant who, an Italian friend told me, sailed from North Africa to Sicily on a sheep. It turned out to be a cruise ship. And just the other day an Italian editor asked me to write an article. A week from now, he said, was the deadline.

So, although the room at home where I work has always seemed benign, maybe I'm living heroically after all.

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