

DECEMBER 1993 VOL. 17 #9

the pits

WHAT'S IN THE MARKET

Antemoya, Carambola, Cherimoya, Cipolini, Bitter melon, Black sapote, Date, Guava, Horned melon, Kumquat, Lemon grass, Loquat, Mango, Olive, Papaya, Persimmon, Pili nuts, Pomegranate, Passion fruit, Prickly pear, Tamarillo, White sapote.

SEEDS

This month Bob Jurgens is offering Crepe myrtle from his own tree. (This is not a pit, but an ornamental tree for zone 7-9), Carob, Bitter melon, Papaya and Passiflora lutea (it bears edible purple fruits).

If you are interested send, \$1.00 per packet and an SASE envelope to: Bob Jurgens, 116-32 227th St., Cambria Heights, NY 11411. Checks should be made payable to the Rare Pit and Plant Council.

** Due to a heavy demand, there will be a delay in bitter melon seeds. We also made an error; the fruits of the passiflora are purple not yellow. Bob grows this plant primarily for its interesting foliage; "it looks like a headless bug".*

TIMELY TIP FOR CITRUS GROWERS

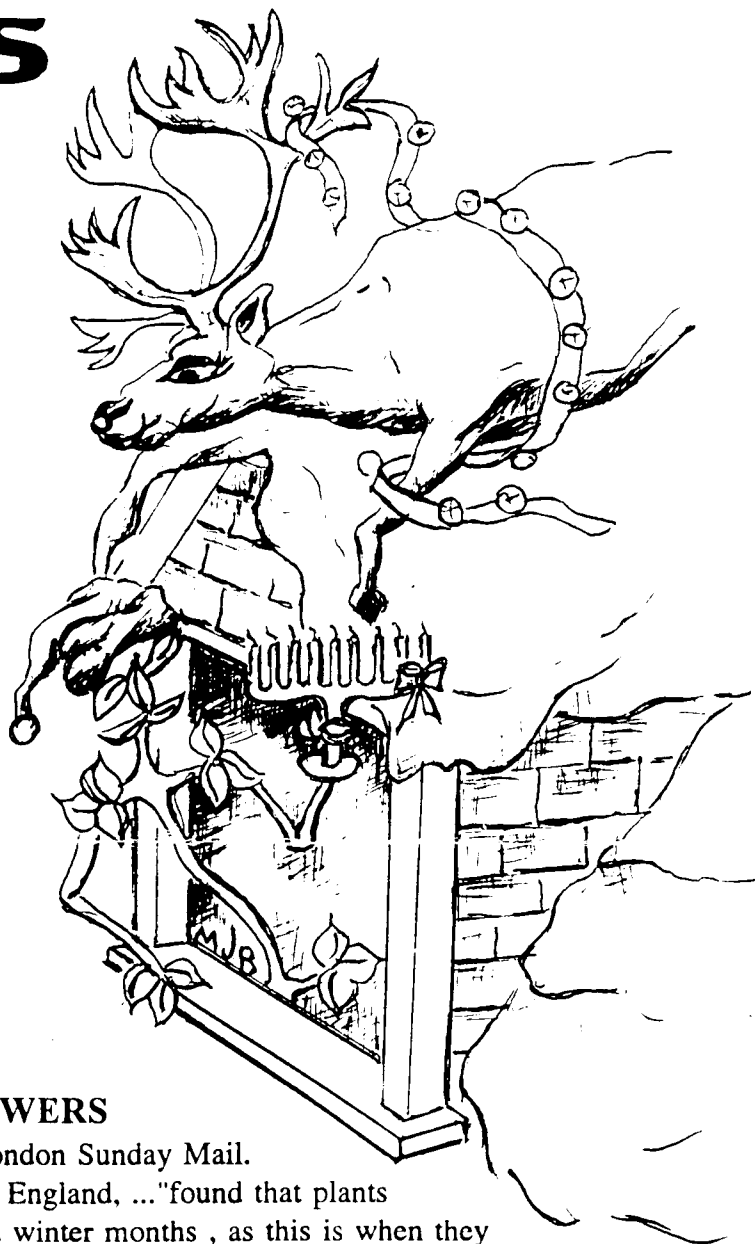
This note comes to us from Canada via the London Sunday Mail.

Patricia Oliver and Jeronimo Martin of Dorset England, ..."found that plants were much healthier if fed throughout the cold winter months, as this is when they produce their fruits. The feeding of nitrogen/phosphate/potassium (NPK) changes with the seasons. In winter, when the plants are about to blossom, they require a formula high in NPK (20-20-20). It is a good idea to change the formula to 25-15-15 when the clock moves to summertime."

Diana Woodhouse, Montreal, Can.

FOR THE GARDENER WHO HAS EVERYTHING

There is still time to send a year's subscription to the Pits or a copy of *Beyond the Avocado* or *The Joy of Pitting*. Call (212) 255-9256 or write the Rare Pit & Plant Council, 251 West 11th St, NYC, NY 10014 and we will send one of our "tasteful" cards out post haste to your friends, informing them of your generosity.



Rare Pit & Plant Council

CAMELLIA SINENSIS

Almost all of us have grown or worn the very ornamental flowers of *Camellia japonica* or *C. sasanqua* and most of us have enjoyed have enjoyed a cup of tea. Tea is made from the processed leaves of *Camellia SINENSIS*, the tea tree. It is not as showy a plant as its ornamental cousins, but then few plants are.

If given its druthers, *C. sinensis* would grow to be a 50' evergreen tree. It is, however, pruned to a height of 5'. The stiff, leathery leaves are pointed and about 2 1/2 in by 1/2 in; slightly smaller than those of *C. japonica*. The single, 2" white, fragrant flowers are borne at the leaf axils and bloom in early spring.

The origins of tea are lost in the mists of time. The plant is thought to have originated in India. There are several charming myths or legends surrounding the origins of the beverage. The most popular tells of a Chinese Emperor (2737 BC) who sat boiling his drinking water while sitting under his favorite tree; the tea tree. Some leaves fell into his water. He was so delighted with his beverage that he began to cultivate the tree. Brewed tea, however, did not come into fashion until the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) some 4,000 years later! Our favorite tells of a Crusader who brought some of the treasured leaves back from the East to his castle in Europe. He carefully instructed his wife on the preparation of tea; do not boil the leaves too long etc. She carefully followed his instructions and served the leaves!! Needless to say, she did not start a fashion.

Tea did not become fashionable in Europe until the early 17th century. By the mid-18th century, it had become so popular in England that it was replacing ale as the beverage of choice for breakfast! The popular coffee houses soon converted to tea and business boomed. The ale house began to lose their clientele. Charles II, in an attempt to help the alehouse keepers declared, "Coffee houses to be centers of sedition and intrigue and made it illegal to keep a coffee house." This decree did not last!

Tea became so popular, governments saw it as a source of profitable revenue and leveled high taxes. We know what the Bostonians thought of that!

All tea comes from the single species *Camellia sinensis*; no known cultivars have been developed. The various types of tea reflect the growing conditions and the curing process. The tea tree is grown commercially in the tropical and subtropical regions of the world. It requires a warm, moist climate with at least 50 inches of rain a year, and grows just above sea level to 7,000 ft.

"The best tea is made from small young shoots and unopened leaf buds, with the choice pick being the terminal bud and the two adjacent leaves. In cooler climates, the bushes are picked five time in 7 months, but in the tropics picking can take place every 7-10 days during the harvesting period.

Picking, which is mainly done by women, is extremely labor intensive. No machine can match the skill of an experienced picker who can gather 60-77 lbs. of leaf in a day. This is sufficient to make 16-20 lbs of manufactured tea."¹ (Imagine what a cup of tea would cost if it were produced in the US).



Major Tea Growing Areas

BLACK TEA

Assam: The best grades have bright golden colored tips and are known as tippy Assam. The brittle black leaves produce a reddish tea with a brisk strong flavor which is ideal for breakfast. (Serve with milk)

Ceylon: High grown Ceylon tea is considered one of the best teas in the world. Its golden color, full taste and delicate fragrance make it suitable for drinking at any time of the day with milk or lemon. It is ideal for serving iced as it does not become cloudy.

China Caravan: A blend of keemun teas (see below) with a distinctive smooth taste. Serve mid-morning with a slice of lemon.

Darjeeling: A large leaf tea which requires 5 minutes to infuse. It has a rich flavor and bouquet reminiscent of muscat grapes. Darjeeling can be served at any time of day with milk or lemon.

Earl Grey: A blend of Darjeeling and China teas flavored with oil of bergamot. It is an ideal afternoon tea and should be served without milk or lemon as it has such a delicate flavor.

English Breakfast: This is usually a blend of Assam and Ceylon teas. With its strong full-bodied flavor, it is an ideal morning drink served with milk.

Irish Breakfast: Usually a blend of strong Assams, it is, as its name implies and early morning drink.

Keemun: Fine quality China teas from Anwei Province. With their rich, delicate flavor, they are less astringent than most teas and are most suitable for those with weak digestion. Drink with or without milk in the afternoon or evening.

Kenya: A fine flavor and astringency makes it very refreshing and uplifting at any time. Serve with milk.

Lapsang Souchong: The best quality comes from the Fukien Province in China. The distinctive tarry, smokey flavor makes it ideal for drinking without milk.

Rose Pouchong: This is from Guagdon on the southeast coast of China. Rose petals are mixed with the leaves to produce a very delicate, fragrant flavor. Serve in the afternoon without milk or lemon.

Russian: From the Republic of Georgia in Russia, which is why it is sometimes known as Georgian tea. It has a full-bodied flavor and should be served Russian style - strong with lemon.

Yunnan: From China's remote western Yunnan Province, this leaf produces a deep golden, clear, bright tea with a sweet delicate scent and flavor.

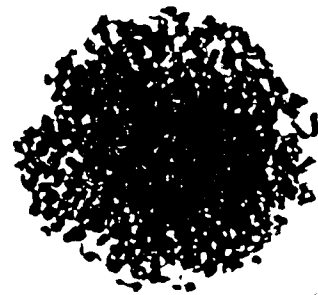


best having silver colored tips. It produces a pale yellow liquid with a light peach flavor, which is best served without milk in the afternoon or evening or with an oriental meal.

Formosa Pouchong: The leaves are scented with gardenia jasmine or yulan blossoms and produce a pale delicate tea for drinking without milk in the afternoon or evening.

OOLONG TEA

Formosa Oolong: One of the best and most expensive teas in the world. It has a large greenish-brown leaf, the



GREEN TEA

Gunpowder: The most popular of the green teas in the West. It has a fruity penetrating flavor and makes a pale straw-colored drink which goes well with Chinese food. It is also good served with mint. (The name "gunpowder" derives the resemblance of the rolled leaves to old-fashioned gunpowder used in ships' cannons. C. Carrdus)

Jasmine: a blend of black and green China tea perfumed with jasmine flowers. It is ideal for serving without milk or lemon to accompany Chinese food.

WHAT ABOUT A WINDOW SILL?

Hardly a major growing area, but a distinct possibility. Tea should be grown in a bright cool windowsill, preferably an eastern exposure, during the cold months of the year. In the late spring, after all danger of frost has past, place it in a moist shady area of the garden. Tea is not as hardy as its cousins and should be brought into the house before the first frost. They require ample moisture... never let them dry out.

Tea plants are grown from cuttings and unless you have a friend who has one and will give you a cutting, you will have to purchase a plant. Woodlanders Nursery, 1128 Colleton Ave., Aiken, SC 298801, (803) 648-7522 is offering bushy 10" plants for \$9.00. A tea tree would make a very unusual Christmas gift.

Can we make our own tea? Probably not, processing tea is very complicated. **Black tea** requires four steps.

1. **Withering.** The freshly picked leaves are dried on a rack until they have lost 50% of their moisture and become 'withered' or limp.

2. **Rolling.** The leaves are rolled by machine in such a way as to break up their cellular structure. This causes the chemical components of the leaf to be mixed together.

3. **Fermentation.** The leaves are left for 1-3 hours in a cool, humid atmosphere to develop a coppery brown hue and characteristic flavor and astringency.

4. **Drying:** When fermentation has reached its desired level, the leaves are dried in chambers until they turn black and have a moisture content of about 5%.

Green Tea leaves are scalded to prevent fermentation before rolling and drying. This preserves the color.

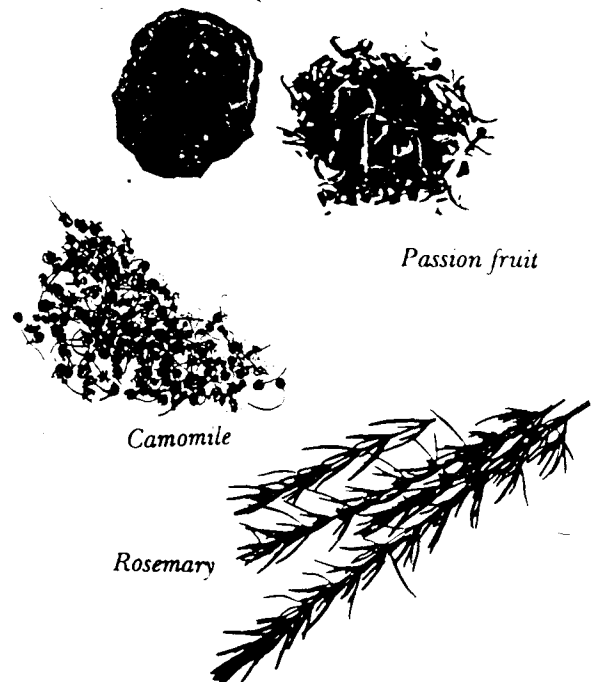
Oolong tea is a cross between green tea and black tea. It is fermented briefly once before and after rolling. The leaves are half brown and produce a tea with a slightly fruity aroma.

SCENTED TEAS

Large leaved teas are flavored with the oils, spices, or dried flowers and fruits to produce light refreshing teas. Some of the teas available are; Lemon, Vanilla, Lotus flower, Mango, Passion fruit, Spice, Almond, Orange blossom, Spice (a mixture of cinnamon and orange peel), Orange blossom and Peach.

INFUSED OR HERBAL TEAS

These do not contain any leaves from the tea plant. They are made of the dried leaves of herbs such as sage, mint, camomile, chrysanthemum, rosemary, thyme, etc. They are cool, refreshing, and many have medicinal value.



THE PERFECT CUP OF TEA:

1. Fill the kettle from the cold water tap: hot water contains less dissolved air and has a flat stale taste.
2. Warm the teapot by rinsing it out with hot water. (Smith College would say the water had to be boiling) This insures that the water stays at the boiling point when it comes in contact with the leaves.
3. Add a teaspoon of tea or 1 tea bag per person and one for the pot.
4. When the water is boiling, take the teapot to the kettle and pour in the water. Replace the lid and let the tea infuse for 3-5 minutes, according to the size of the leaf; large leaves take longer. Tea releases its color before its flavor. Tea may reach the desired color in 1 minute, but not release its flavor for another 3. Stir before pouring.
5. Always serve freshly brewed tea. Otherwise it will have a stewed taste.

Brew, don't stew!

A tea tasting can be a festive and educational theme for a party.

Maria del Gado de la Cruz medicinal tea

1. Boil two cups of water on the stove.
2. The juice of half and lemon and the rind of that half.
3. 1/4 slice of apple.

Boil these together and have the invalid breathe in the fumes. Then pour the water into a tea pot with 1 tsp tea leaves, steep, sweeten with honey and have the invalid drink the brew. It is tasty, refreshing and a definite pick-me-up around 4 pm. (*It works, I used it for a bronchial throat. MJB*) We welcome any further comments.

1. Coffee & tea, a Gourmet's Guide, Lisle Mackley, HP Books, 1992

MICROWAVE

Microwave ovens are widely available, but surprisingly many people are afraid of them, or of what they will do to food. Others have them, but use them for heating coffee or leftovers. Microwave ovens emit no radioactivity and are completely safe, unless you are inside the oven or possibly have a cardiac pacemaker influenced by microwaves.

Using a microwave does require the cook to rethink his approach in the kitchen. Microwaves work by exciting water molecules in the food and heating them from within, rather than from without, as in traditional cooking. This means foods like vegetables that have a high water content cook quickly and retain their natural color, flavor and vitamin content. Dried foods like rice and dried beans have no water content and are poor candidates for the microwave. Julienne carrots and turnips with a little butter will cook in 3-4 minutes. Deborah makes a delicious ratatouille starting with the slower cooking vegetables and adding the others every minute or so. The individual flavors of the vegetables are retained.

A good way to get started is with a microwave cookbook. One of the best is Microwave Gourmet by Barbara Kafka, 1987, William Morrow, New York. The following is a one dish meal that can be prepared in 12 minutes and will blow your guests away.

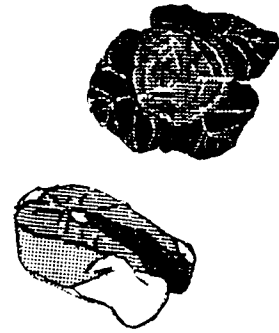
- 1/2 pound skinless boneless fish. Salmon, swordfish ends, etc. cut into 2 " chunks
- 1/3 head of cabbage shredded
- 1 small onion cut into thin slices
- 2 tbl butter
- 2 tsp curry powder.

Melt the butter in a 2 quart, high sided casserole. Add the slices of onion, shredded cabbage and curry. Mix and cover the casserole with plastic wrap.. Cook on high for 4 minutes. Take out and stir until the vegetables are coated evenly with the curry mixture. Pile the vegies in a ▶

Microwave, cont'd ... mound in the center of the casserole. Place the chunks of fish around the edge. Tightly cover the casserole with plastic wrap and return to the microwave for 8 minutes. Take out of the microwave and let cool for 3 minutes before serving.

We like this recipe because it takes humble cabbage and ennobles it. It illustrates how fast and easy microwave cooking can be. It also illustrates how adapted to the microwave fish cooking is. Here is an even simpler recipe that is my own:

Take a one pound salmon fillet, moisten it with liquid hickory or mesquite smoke and place a pat of butter on the top. Cover the dish with plastic wrap and microwave for 3-4 minutes until done.



One advantage of this kind of cooking is that it is easy to check for doneness as you go along. There are few disadvantages or limitations that should be noted. The most well known is that microwaves don't brown the outside of meat, so the cooked product doesn't look as appetizing.

John Hart

THE PITS CHRISTMAS GAME

Most every one of these United States has an "official tree" and an "official flower." These plants are not very well known, even to residents of the state concerned (Do you know your state flower?) They are also tricky - the state that is nicknamed the "Nutmeg State" has the Oak, not the Nutmeg as its State Tree. Based on a game played at the Pits Christmas Party, here are the Official Flowers and Trees of 25 states, plus a hint to help identification. Our winner scored 21 out of 25 - answers next time:

State Flower	State Tree	Hint	Answer
1) Poppy	Redwood	Here I Come!	CA
2) Laurel	Oak	Oak, not Nutmeg!	CT
3) Orange Blossom	Palmetto	State of retirement	FL
4) Golden Rod	Tulip	Do horses get hay fever?	IN
5) Sagebrush	Piñon	Have a gamble	NV
6) Segoe Lily	Spruce	Home of some saints	VT
7) Rose	Sugar Maple	You're standing on it	WA
8) Lilac	Birch	Live free or what??	WI
9) Saguaro	Paloverde	Contains a famous canyon	WY
10) Violet	Oak	Has a sick abbreviation	ZZ
11) Columbine	Spruce	Mile-high trees	CC
12) Sunflower	Cottonwood	How corny can you get?	ND
13) Wild Rose	Oak	"Where the tall corn grows"	SD
14) Mayflower	Elm	On the bay	MA
15) Carnation	Buckeye	Why, oh why, oh why-o?	OH
16) Clover	Maple	Are its mountains green?	VT
17) Magnolia	Cypress	A bargain purchase	LA
18) Yucca	Piñon	North of the border, just	ND
19) Iris	Poplar	Best-selling waltz	TN
20) Bluebonnet	Pecan	Think of a star	TX
21) Mistletoe	Redbud	All Right!	VA
22) Dogwood	Dogwood	Yes, There is a Santa Claus!	VT
23) Peach blossom	Live Oak	On my mind	VA
24) Violet	Maple	State with longest name	VA
25) Prairie Rose	Elm	Capital = Prussian general	VA

The Cranberry Connection

by Beatrice Ross Buszek

(Nimbus, 1977; \$11.95)

I first started writing reviews of plant books because of the free reviewer's copies I used to receive. I never told this to my young friend, Beth, but I always aspired to be the Roach Motel of books...you know, they check in, but they don't check out!

So a long time ago, an unsuspecting Beth handed be this slightly eccentric-looking small format volume subtitled, CRANBERRY COOKERY with Flavour, Fact and Folklore, from memories, libraries and kitchens of old and new friends---and strangers. From this, and from the fact that it was apparently published by a vanity press, I assumed that it was either cute or (the dreaded) cutesy. I flipped through the pages, and saw that every bit of text was hand lettered (by Mrs. Buszek, at Cranberrie [sic] Cottage in Nova Scotia.) Now I saw that I was confronting hard-core sincerity, a quality against which I am usually helpless. Mrs. Buszek has crafted a charming volume, the least of which is the collection of unimaginative recipes, which could, for the most part, have been culled from November issues of Family Circle or Good Housekeeping.

The book is more a cranberry consciousness raising effort than a collection of creative ways to use cranberries in cooking. You will just have to take this on faith, but I was about to write that one can include cranberries in just about everything short of coleslaw, when I looked over at the book and it WAS OPEN to a recipe for North Mountain Coldslaw. I'd give you the recipe but it is protected, but I'll share the ingredient list with you:

1/4 c. sliced (I kid you not) cranberries,
honey, celery seeds, mayonnaise,
vinegar, shredded cabbage, salt
"variation: add juice from canned fruit"



PIT REVIEWS

I guess it doesn't have to look or sound or taste good because a recipe could be from the (flawed?) memories of one of the "strangers" mentioned in the subtitle. I adore cranberries, and include them in a wide range of food and drinks and baked goods and chutneys and the odd glaze for meat, and found that the recipes did rather little for me. Then there is the

other part of the book. Interspersed among the recipes are, (again hand printed, but this time in red ink,) the promised Fact and Folklore, and here is where she really won me over! The items followed no detectable order, but it was fun to go through the book just jumping from one red ink item to the next and learn about the size of crops, the growth of the

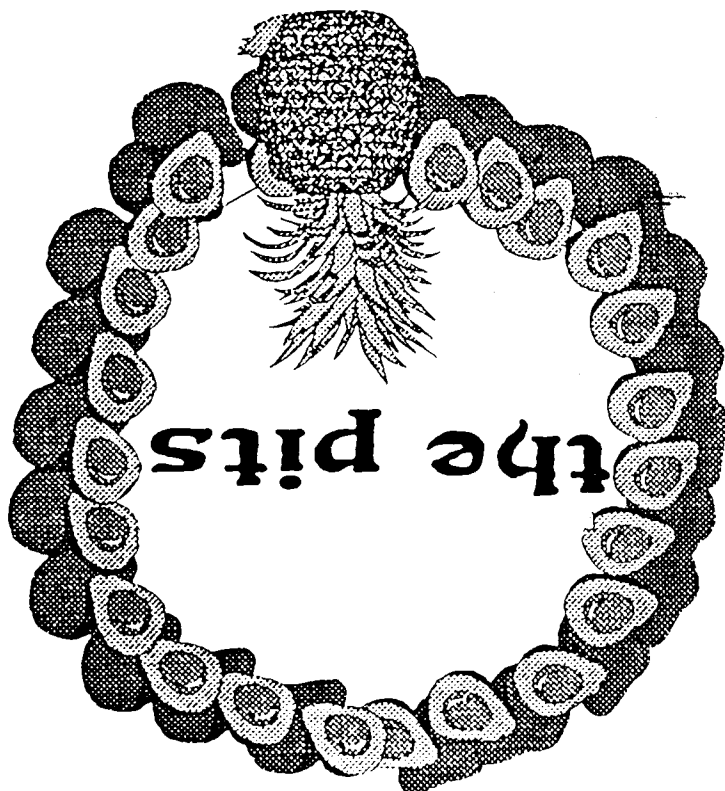
industry, the history of cranberries, tools for harvesting, methods of reseeding, etc. Some were fascinating, others a bit simple. but pleasing in the way they revealed the writer's enthusiasm for her topic.

Shifrah's DID YOU KNOW corner:

Did you know that cranberries are sorted and graded not by color or by size, but by bounce? The sorting devices have a series of from 20-30 steps. The firm berries bounce their way to the bottom, while the soft berries stay on those steps. Now, tell me you knew that all along! (She didn't say what they do with the step sitters.) Also, for some reason, I never realized that cranberries are members of the Heath family, (Ericaceae.)

I'm not sure for whom the book is written, but anyone can have fun spending time with it. In any case, while I was thinking about all this. Beth was maturing, and deciding that she'd like her book back, already, and went for some assertiveness training, so I'm writing this now, and returning her book before I get into real trouble.

ShifrahNimchinsky



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