FREE BOOK

ENZO MANCINI

The Little Green Grocery Book

Six store rules from Carmela's green notebook



by Enzo Mancini

41 years a butcher in Newark, New Jersey

Open the book ›



What is inside

Six store rules from Carmela's green notebook



Write twenty prices once
The back page of the notebook
Rule 1 ›



Real sale or yellow sign?
Three questions before you reach
Rule 2 ›



Find your store's markdown hour
When and where the stickers go on
Rule 3 ›



One whole chicken, three dinners
The bird that pays you back
Rule 4 ›

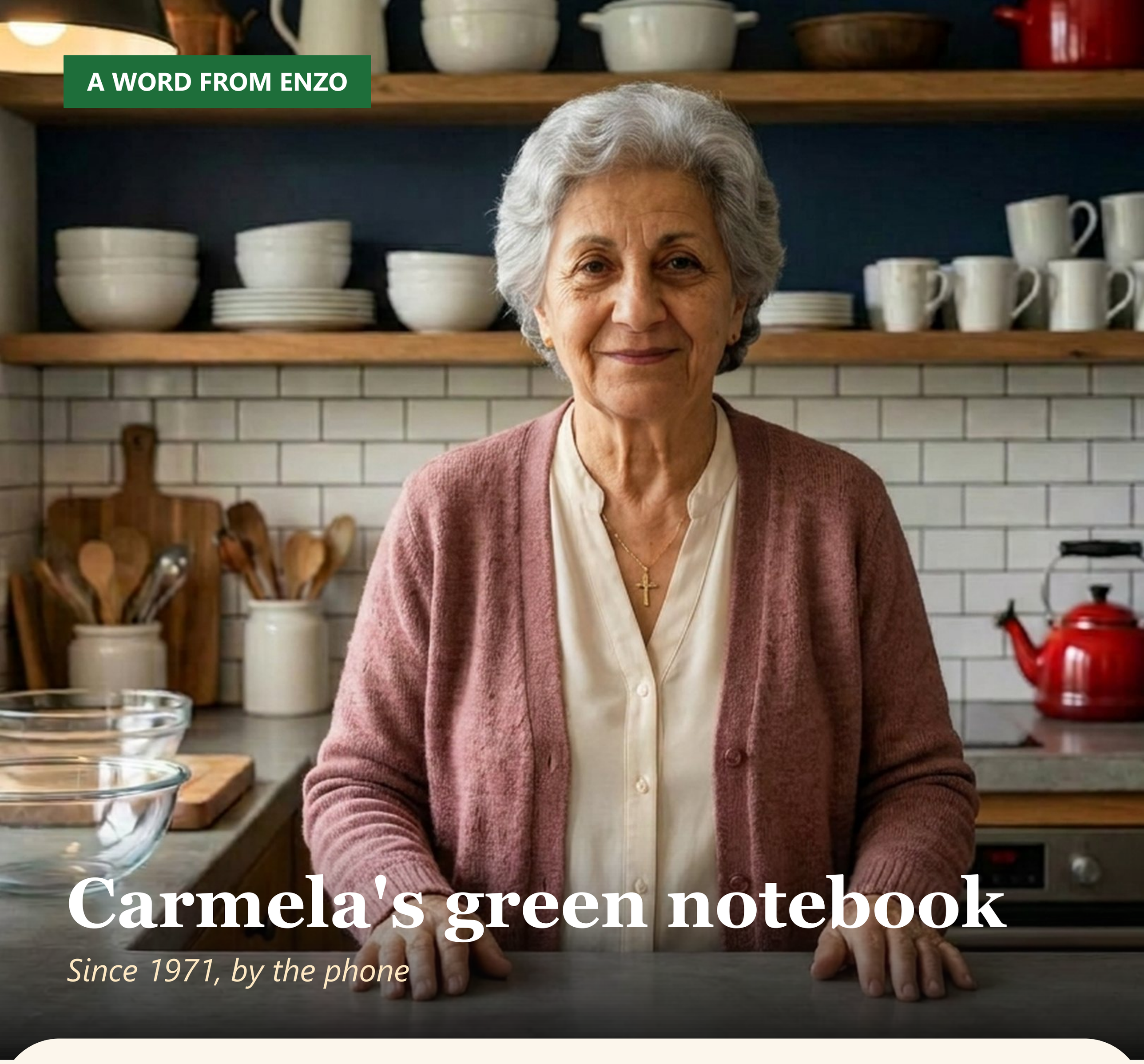


The week: $60 for two, $40 for one
Every receipt line, in pencil
Rule 5 ›



Ten dinners under $2 a plate
Carmela cooked from the end of the day
Rule 6 ›

The weekly sheet
Screenshot me. Keep me on your phone.
Keep it ›



Carmela's green notebook

Since 1971, by the phone

Since 1971 my wife Carmela has kept a green notebook by the phone: every price, every week. This little book is a few of her pages, written out for you. Six rules, one page each, and a weekly sheet to keep. Nobody gets rich, but the bill stops surprising you.

Do one rule this week. Piano, piano.



Write twenty prices once

The back page of the notebook

THE MISTAKE

A yellow sign says sale and you reach, because you don't know what eggs cost last week. Nobody does. The receipt faded in a drawer, so the sign does your remembering, and a sale you can't check is only a yellow sign.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

In the back of the notebook Carmela keeps the same twenty things, price and date every time she sees them. Eggs, flour, bread, ground beef, chicken, coffee, olive oil, canned tomatoes. The size sits next to the name, so a shrinking bag gets caught. This week at Walmart a dozen large store-brand eggs is around $1.70 and 5 lb / 2.3 kg of flour around $2 on rollback.

DO THIS

1. Buy a composition book, around a dollar, and a pencil
2. Start with your five most-bought things, size and price
3. Add lines until you have twenty

REMEMBER

Twenty prices once, and no sign fools you again.



Real sale or yellow sign?

Three questions before you reach

THE MISTAKE

You see the sign, the price looks lower than something, and it's in the cart before your brain has a say. A week later half of it is in the garbage. The sign was true. It wasn't a sale for you.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

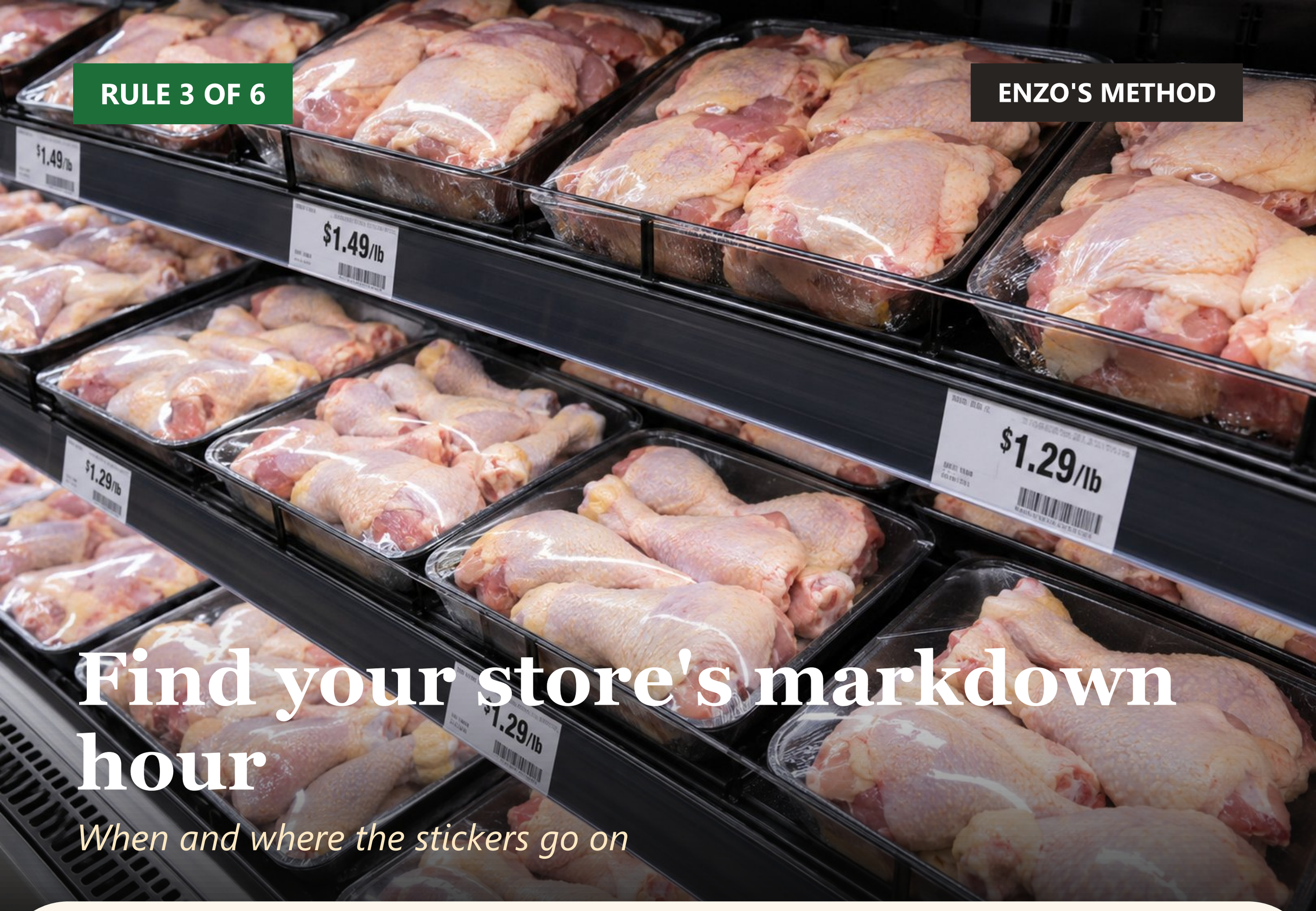
Three questions. One: what does my price book call normal? Last spring the government's average for a dozen eggs passed $6; by late summer it had fallen by nearly half. A high price can be waited out. Two: is it cheaper per ounce than the plain bag? Big rice at full price often loses to small rice on sale. Three: will I cook or freeze it this week?

DO THIS

1. Open the price book before you reach
2. Divide the sticker by the weight, even the reduced sticker
3. Buy only what you'll cook or freeze this week

REMEMBER

A bargain you throw away costs more than full price.



Find your store's markdown hour

When and where the stickers go on

THE MISTAKE

You walk past the same meat case every week holding the full price. The sticker that halves it goes on an hour after you leave. You think reduced means going bad. It means the store wants it sold today instead of tomorrow.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

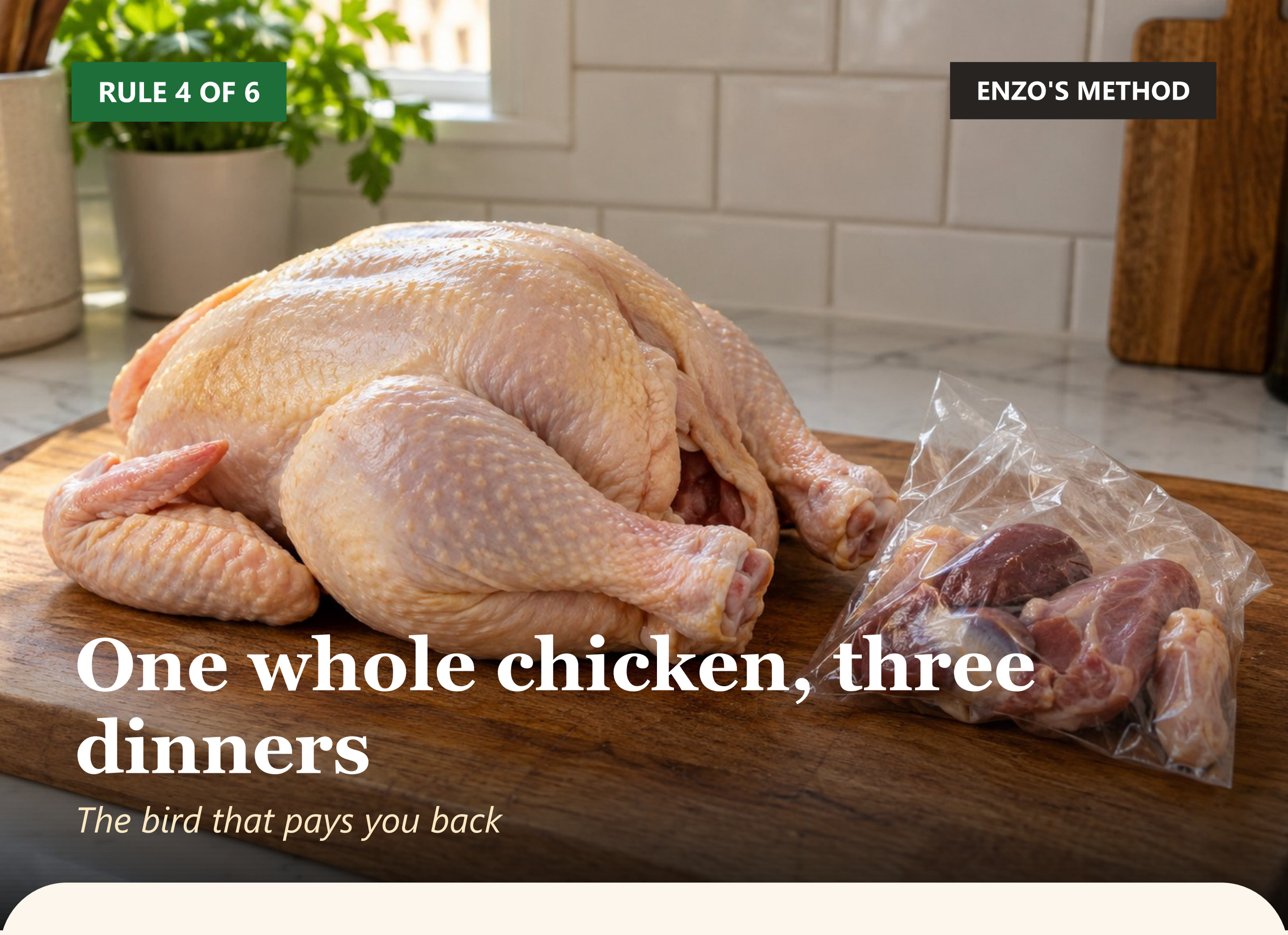
For 41 years I walked my case each morning and marked down what wouldn't look good by Monday. Mrs. Lindquist came Saturdays, five minutes before closing, for the ends. Meat is often marked down at the morning date check, the bakery and deli late in the day. Sell-by is the store's date, not yours. Ground meat keeps 1 to 2 days in the fridge, roasts 3 to 5.

DO THIS

1. Ask the person in the apron when they mark down
2. Walk the case morning and late afternoon for a week, write the hour
3. Cook or freeze sticker meat that same day

REMEMBER

Sticker meat gets cooked today or frozen today.



One whole chicken, three dinners

The bird that pays you back

THE MISTAKE

You buy boneless breasts because they're easy, and you pay a plant worker four minutes of knife work at double the price. Then you eat the breast on Sunday, and the week starts from zero again, with nothing in the pot.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

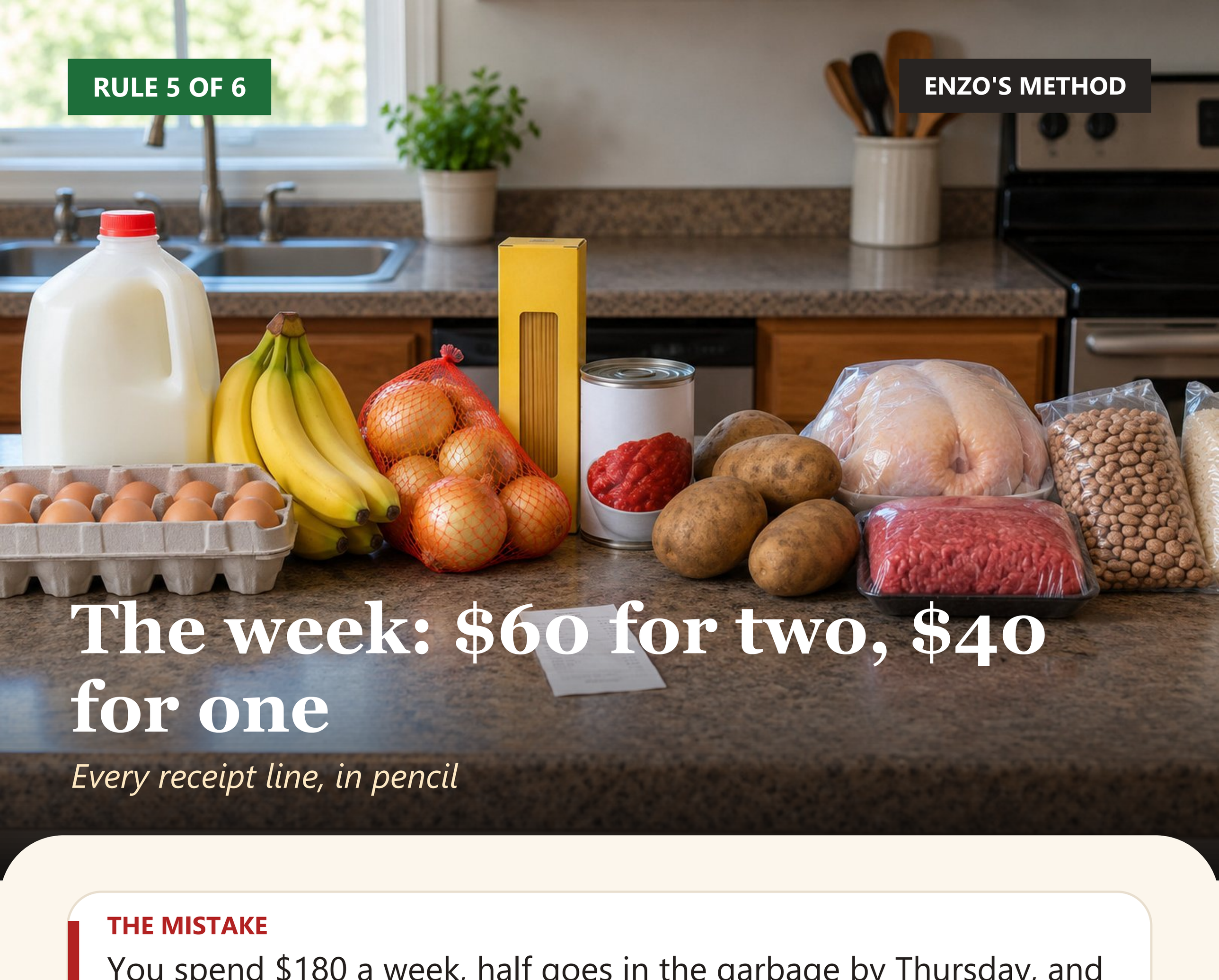
Whole fresh chicken runs around $2.06 a pound; boneless breast around $4.20. Sunday, roast it at 425 F / 220 C until the thigh reads 165 F / 74 C, legs and potatoes in the drippings. Monday, the breast in one pot with rice. Tuesday, bones and skin simmer 90 minutes into brodo, two beaten eggs stirred in.

DO THIS

1. Pull leftover meat off the bones within 2 hours and refrigerate
2. Cool the broth in shallow containers, fridge within 2 hours
3. No time? The Costco rotisserie is around $5; take it and walk out

REMEMBER

One $8 bird, or $17 of breast. The bones decide.



The week: $60 for two, $40 for one

Every receipt line, in pencil

THE MISTAKE

You spend $180 a week, half goes in the garbage by Thursday, and you blame the prices. The government's moderate budget for a couple over fifty is around $180. Carmela and I eat meat, eat well, and spend about a third.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

Our week at Walmart, each around: a whole chicken $7.50; eggs $2.50; lentils $2; tomatoes $3; pasta $2; onions, garlic, carrots, celery $7; cabbage $2.50; kale $1.50; potatoes $1.75; peas $1; tuna $2; bread $1.50; apples $4; olive oil $3; coffee $4; Romano $2. Around $50; $60 with salt and lemon. For one, eleven: bananas, onions, eggs, milk, spaghetti, crushed tomatoes, potatoes, a whole chicken, ground beef, dry beans, rice, around $35 to $40.

DO THIS

1. Walk the outside edge first, then one trip down the middle
2. Write the total in the notebook the same day

REMEMBER

Buy things that need you. You pay for food, not labor.



Ten dinners under $2 a plate

Carmela cooked from the end of the day

THE MISTAKE

Six o'clock, you open the fridge: half a cabbage, a can of beans, a heel of bread hard as a brick, and you order out. The heel goes in the trash. That was dinner, and it cost about 55 cents.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

Walmart and Aldi prices, per plate: spaghetti with garlic and oil, around 85 cents; pasta e ceci, 65; potato frittata, 55; pasta e fagioli with a cheese rind, 55; rice and peas, 45; pasta and potatoes, 60; eggs in purgatory, $1.25; ribollita, 75 cents; meatballs on 10 oz / 280 g of beef, more bread than meat, $1.75; one chicken, three dinners, $1.85. Ten plates, around $9.40; the average is 94 cents.

DO THIS

1. Save a cup of pasta water; it's the sauce
2. Meatballs to 160 F / 71 C, chicken to 165 F / 74 C
3. Keep every bread heel for Friday's soup

REMEMBER

The cheap dinner was already in the house.

KEEP IT ON YOUR PHONE



The weekly sheet

Screenshot me. Keep me on your phone.

- [ ] Open three doors first: fridge, freezer, pantry
- [ ] Use these first: _____, _____, _____
- [ ] Three dinners this week: _____, _____, _____
- [ ] Buy only what is missing for those three
- [ ] This week's cap: $_____, decided at the table, not the register
- [ ] One star line, one small thing we want
- [ ] List in store order: produce, meat, dairy, cans, house
- [ ] Eat an apple before the car keys
- [ ] Read the receipt in the car, two minutes
- [ ] Sunday, fifteen minutes: look, plan, write

REMEMBER

One trip, one list, one number at the top.

BEFORE YOU GO

Notes and picture credits

I am Enzo, a retired butcher from Newark, New Jersey. I am not a chef and not a doctor. These are the habits of my family, general guidance only. Prices are about prices from U.S. stores seen in October 2026 and change from store to store. For your health, ask your doctor. Gas, electrical or structural trouble: call a professional.

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The whole notebook

Everything my family and I know

If this little green book saved you a few dollars, my friend, there is a bigger one.

It is called Enzo's Notebook. It holds everything my family and I know, in one place: the kitchen, the ledger, the toolbox and Carmela's own pages, one rule on each page, with the numbers we really use. I wrote it slowly and carefully, from 41 years behind the counter. If you would like it, scan the code or visit enzosbook.com. If not, keep this little book and do one rule this week. Thank you for reading, my friend.

enzosbook.com

Scan with your phone camera, or tap the button.

See the full notebook ›