SLOW FOOD NATION—
Two Members Share Their Personal Observations

Changemakers Day* at Slow Food Nation
Contributed by Barbara Bowman

I attended a workshop titled “Reframing the Slow Food Conversation to Support Food Justice.” I chose it because Josh Viertel, the new and first president of Slow Food USA, was a panelist. I wanted to see him in action.

Moderator Hank Herrera opened the session by saying that the chain link fence built around the Slow Food’s Civic Center dinner was a troubling symbol of the group’s exclusivity. Where were the people who lived in this neighborhood?

The panelists reported that 300,000 citizens of Oakland are served by one supermarket and many convenience stores with small offerings of high-priced, high-carb foods. The panelists used the phrase “food apartheid” to describe the difference between the food systems of the Oakland hills and flatlands.

Except for Viertel, panel members expressed anger over Slow Food’s power, resources and bravado. They asked Slow Food to NOT take over the Food Justice movement, but instead support existing grassroots organizations. Josh Viertel is a good listener. He concluded, “Slow Food can’t lead; how can we serve?”

On Being a Good Neighbor
Contributed by Stephanie Chiacos

The drive down to San Francisco couldn’t have been more beautiful. When I arrived at Van Ness Avenue, white tents glowed in front of me. The crowd was multi-cultural, multi-colorful and multi-lingual, with a broad socio-economic range and every age bracket. The atmosphere was festive and the farmers/producers joyful. I tasted my way through the market, buying a bag of Bronx grapes and a round of Red Hawk cheese from Cowgirl Creamery, and then found the Victory Garden that had grown tall, wide and bountiful. In the garden were various farmers and producers using their 20 minutes to educate the masses.

On my way over to Herbst Theater, I dodged the crowds waiting patiently in line for the many Slow-on-the-Go purveyors dishing up delectable meals. Others were eating at a giant communal table constructed of thick 20-foot planks balanced on pieces of scaffolding.

At the theater, I settled down for a panel discussion among Carlo Petrini, Alice Waters, Eric Schlosser, Wendell Berry, Michael Pollan and Vandana Shiva, moderated (and translated) by Corby Kummer. The focus of the discussion was the future of Slow Food in America and how we can

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* In collaboration with Roots of Change (ROC), Changemakers Day convened leaders focused on sustainable food systems. The day's goal was to create concrete and effective collaboration.
bring more Americans to the table. Several comments during the discussion stood out for me:

1) We must bring immigrant farm workers into the movement. (*Eric Schlosser*)
2) We need to achieve social justice and respect for the people who don’t have what we do; take responsibility for the lack of focus on human rights; and acknowledge our interdependence with workers in all phases of our food production and delivery systems. (*Carlo Petrini*)
3) We are in a food apartheid now; we must be protectors of the poor. (*Vandana Shiva*)

Actions recommended by the panelists:
- Plant a small garden.
- Buy locally.
- See food not as a commodity but as a sacrament.
- Regard eating as an agricultural act.
- Do everything we can to broaden the movement and help each other.
- Try each day to consume a little less and waste a little less.
- Have the will and spirit to confront politicians and create a small revolution.
- Influence by example, and speak for those who cannot be heard.

Food Traditions in Guatemala

by Marilee Wingert

As part of their daily meal preparations, the women of Pachay las Lomas in Guatemala, the “Chicken Ladies,” make use of a piedra. This is a volcanic stone slab that functions as a grinder to crush, mash, and puree such foods as corn, coffee, chiles, and tomatoes. The use of the piedra goes back thousands of years. The molcajete, the three-legged stone mortar and pestle that is associated with Mexican cooking, evolved from the piedra. Because of its durability, the grinding stone is passed from mother to daughter. One of the village leader’s prized possessions is her grandmother’s piedra.

The handheld grinding tool is called the brazo, or arm. Ingredients are placed in the center of the slab and the heavy brazo is rolled rhythmically back and forth over the food until the desired texture is reached. By age 10, all of the village girls are skilled in the use of this tool.

Over time, much like a cast iron pan, the piedra becomes seasoned. Seasoning allows flavors to transfer from one preparation to the next. The Chicken Ladies are aware of electric blenders, but they prefer the piedra since it produces food that is mucho mas rica—much more delicious.

In the photo above, a puree is being made which became part of a ceremonial chicken soup prepared last December for a celebration to honor the scholarship donors from our Slow Food convivium. At present, 36 students are enrolled in school through the scholarship program. That number includes one young woman who is now in her second year at the university as a result of funds pledged by one member for an entire college education. The extremely grateful students expressed their thanks, not only for the important economic support, but also for the moral support that accompanies it.
I was raised in Los Angeles, smack dab in the middle of the entertainment industry. Because my parents were part of the 60’s Hollywood jet set, I was often a “latch-key child.” That is when books entered my life. Although I loved roaming the streets, causing havoc with the other members of my Schwinn Stingray bicycle gang, there had to be some down time. Those were the moments when I escaped into the fantasy of books.

The world of books saved my life in many ways. Beginning at about the age of ten, I devoured books in my spare time, often reading as many as three or four a week. I read everything from Carlos Castañeda and Richard Brautigan to Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Henry Miller. The only reason I graduated from high school in Suffolk, England in 1975, was because I could pass tests based solely on what I had learned from books.

I was not the kind of kid who did well in school. In fact, all sixteen of the schools I attended as a child experienced quite a bit of difficulty trying to keep me in my seat. Attention Deficit Disorder was not the buzz word that it is now and I was written off as a hyperactive pain in the neck. Consequently, it’s no surprise that I became a professional chef, entering the world of kitchens in London’s Hard Rock Cafe at the age of fourteen.

Kitchen work was perfect for me. I loved the adrenaline rush of a busy service and thrived on multitasking. The more work I was given to do, the calmer my inner world felt. Before long, I knew in my heart that I had found my home.

By 1978 I was working as a pantry chef at Michael’s Restaurant in Santa Monica, California. At the time, Michael’s was considered one of the nation’s top establishments, along with Chez Panisse, Le Cirque, Ma Maison, L’Hermitage, and others. It was the dawning of the California Cuisine movement and the show was wild. Michael’s was owned by 29-year old Michael McCarty; the kitchen was headed up by Jonathan Waxman and a host of other young chefs, many of whom are now household names.

Although I had been cooking for a few years by then, this was my first entrée into the world of fine cuisine. The pace was fast and the learning curve steep, and I began to turn to cook books to keep up. Jacques Pepin had just come out with his masterpieces, La Cuisine and La Method, and the Time-Life series edited by Richard Olney was just beginning to appear. These books were the first among thousands to come that I turned to for ideas and techniques. During my shifts at Michael’s I would religiously study the movements of my colleagues, trying to soak up as much as possible. Then I would go home and study my books to fully understand the craft of what I had observed.

As my aspirations and dreams grew, I moved on to the literature of food to get the feel of being the top dog in a restaurant. I could relate my own experiences in a busy kitchen to those of George Orwell (in Down and Out in Paris and London) and of Chef Fernand Point at La Pyramide in Lyon, France in my all-time favorite book, Blue Trout

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and Black Truffle (by Joseph Wechberg). Chef Point trained almost all of the great chefs of France from the past century. This group was known as The Band de Bocuse after Paul Bocuse, one of the first apprentices of note in La Pyramide’s kitchen and the first French chef to become a media superstar.

Over the years I expanded my repertoire to include everything from M.F.K. Fisher and Elisabeth David, to A.J. Liebling and James Beard. At one point I had so many food-related books in our house that my wife threatened to leave if I didn’t make room for her and the children. I thought this was a bit over the top—why would anyone prefer room to sleep over such an incredible library?

By the mid-80’s, after stints with Jeremiah Tower in San Francisco, George Perrier in Philadelphia and others, I was ready to take on my own kitchen. So in 1986 in Seattle, I opened my first restaurant. I called it Rover’s after a 19th century children’s book called Rover’s Dinner Party. Rover’s was a small house that I remodeled into a restaurant with gardens, which was innovative at that time. Dining was in four separate rooms, and one of them was lined completely around the ceiling with my collection of books. As time went by, customers began to bring me rare cook books in trade for food, and I loved chatting with these fellow book nerds.

I have continued to collect books, although now I use them to stay current with what is happening in the food world. I especially like to browse through books by top chefs such as Alain Ducasse and Thomas Keller. Although I tend not to use their recipes, I learn a lot about presentation from the photographs, and about new techniques and flavor combinations. Anthony Bourdain’s Kitchen Confidential, published a few years back, was a welcome addition to the modern lore of what it means to be a chef. Although Anthony’s background is New York and mine is the West Coast, we are about the same age and share many similar stories. It was a hoot to have someone finally break the glamour bubble and give people a sense of what it is really like in many of this country’s kitchens! (I do not like the way cooking is glamorized in certain books or television shows because it leads many young people down the wrong path. I have stopped teaching at professional cooking schools because it is disappointing to teach adults without the aptitude or stamina to be professional cooks. Their minds are full of fancy about having their own food network show, without an understanding of how they must pay their dues.)

But my favorite books are still the older ones, from the great food writers who lived in Paris during the mid-twenties, or colorful chefs like James Beard. I also cherish books and recipes from regions of America, especially those put together by ladies’ cooking leagues, foragers and hunters, and anyone who has a handle on smoking or preserving. Basically, I am a cook-book addict and I find it almost impossible not to buy them when they are put in front of me. I wouldn’t change that for the world, if for no other reason than some day I will have a great library to donate.

The life of a working chef is not an easy one, and now that I am in my early fifties, my body tends to hurt much more than my eyes and I love to sit down and read. Many Americans seem to share this fascination with food and its lore, and cook books sell like hot cakes. Some day I may be fortunate enough to write one of my own. Then I will have completed the circle of love of food and the written word. Until then, I am content to enjoy the work of others and am very grateful for those chefs who are talented enough to write about the fruits of their craft with the same passion, skill and knack for creation that they do in their kitchens.
The Big Kitchen exploded with taste and held the universe together. His universe. It only took him three years after his formal training, sweating in galley kitchens for twelve hour shifts, to learn how to play with his food.

The first special menu Jules created in his first restaurant, called La Famille Jules, was for Halloween. Halloween, the eve of All Saints Day, gave birth to its antithesis: a “petty-thieves” day menu. With Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht’s Three Penny Opera playing and sung in German, he served Stollen Kisses, Fleeced Lamb, Plucked Maidenhead Fern, Pinched Halibut Cheeks, A Salted Cod, Lifted-Skirt Steak, and a Tart of Poached Pears. They came for the food, had a good laugh, and Jules made money.

And then, this Strawberry got in line with all the other Strawberries, all equally succulent red, all circling like electrons around the nucleus that was Jules. Out of that firmament he plucked his strawberry galette. The one he made at the beginning of summer, when the bing cherries had plumped and darkened. The one he made many summers ago for Ann, the young woman who would become his wife. The strawberries were mixed with those plump bings and some freshly dried cherries that had a languorous soak in Calvados. The galette dough was brushed with sweet butter and honey. This was his love sonnet, heart red, rustic and beating with the heat that overwhelmed him.

Jules couldn’t help himself. After finishing his degree at the C.I.A. in Hyde Park, he was invited to further his education at the very underground Le Cordon Noir, not the very accessible Le Cordon Bleu—“Le Cordon Blah”—as they liked to call it. It was there that Jules realized the oh-so-obvious: food didn’t just bring memories but created them. Every food had a tendril in the cultural landscape and that landscape was nowhere better understood than in the art of literature, painting, film, and language. These provided the Big Kitchen that Jules could cook in. Personal memories prepared in
TONGUE-TIED IN ITALY

A Travel Essay by Lynda Salter Chenoweth

ONE OF THE JOYS of foreign travel for me is the opportunity to roam local farmers markets and food shops in search of seasonal products and then return to a well-equipped apartment to cook what’s been purchased.

My favorite green-grocers in Cortona, Italy, are Roberto and Nunciantina, a married couple who have a frutta e verdura shop just off the Piazza della Republica. I have shopped in their store frequently over the years, and have delighted in Nunciantina’s unflagging determination to improve my Italian vocabulary and pronunciation.

On one memorable occasion, I entered the store on a rainy winter’s day in search of ingredients for a soup I was planning for dinner that night. Nunciantina greeted me with a smile and waited with a quizzical look for me to utter (badly) what I wanted. “Ha il ferro, Nunciantina?” I asked. She stared at me in disbelief. “Ferro?” “Si,” I said, “per suppa.” She walked over to some metal display shelves in the store and started to shake them. “Questo é ferro!!” she exclaimed in exasperation, pointing out that I had asked for iron. She waited for my next assault on the Italian language. I had obviously mispronounced what I wanted, so tried another approach. “Seme?” I asked, hoping that the word “seed” would indicate I was after a vegetable product rather than a mineral. “Ah!” she exclaimed, “farro. Si, si.” Shaking her head in amazement, she produced the quarter kilo of farro I requested and waved me out the door.

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Farro, also known as emmer wheat, is considered by some to be the second wheat to be domestically cultivated. Until early Roman times, farro was the most important cultivated form of wheat in the Near East, Africa, and Europe. (The first cultivated wheat seems to have been einkorn wheat, grown in cooler climates such as northern France and the southern Alps.) Farro was used in ancient times to prepare porridge and a form of polenta. It was too hard to be ground into fine flour so was cracked to form a kind of bulgar. Today, farro has regained popularity as a healthy, essential ingredient in soups. (Try it instead of pasta or rice in a broth-based soup with tomatoes, sautéed onions, and cavolo nero—the dark kale to be found in our farmers markets.) It can also be cooked like couscous for cold salads, side dishes and, pre-soaked, as a substitute for rice in a risotto dish. In Italy, the latter is called “farotto.”

When I was young, my mother made Chicken Kiev. I do not mean for dinner from time to time but rather, by the dozens. She wrapped the chicken breasts around parsley butter, dipped them in egg and breadcrumbs, wrapped them in packages of four and froze them. Later she delivered them out of a cooler in the back of her Volkswagen Squareback. The deliveries were made to various households where the lady of the house didn’t have the time or inclination to cook for a dinner party. She could thaw the chicken and sauté it in butter, and smile when the first guest gasped at the butter squirting out of the chicken as it was cut. Little did I know that without a commercial kitchen or permits my mother was a part of the food underground.

Sandor Katz’s book, The Revolution Will Not Be Microwaved, was among several books on food unfortunate to appear in the shadow of The Omnivore’s Dilemma. In the book, Sandor discusses many forms of the underground food movement. He uses a lot of interesting statistics and historical research as well as stories of the people involved. He tells the tales with great empathy, understanding, and humor. Sandor connects well with people and can communicate clearly what he discovers to his readers. There are exemplary recipes in many of the sections and the graphic design has a certain radical 60’s charm.

Sandor’s book takes you to a few places you did not plan to go. While most of us believe in seed saving and clean water rights, few of us will look for food in the dumpster behind the supermarket or compost our own waste. But knowledge always expands our perspective and the story is told so well that we enjoy the ride.

Since I work in a highly regulated food industry, I found myself being jealous of underground food producers. The rules (when there are no regulations) were simple: establish your values and live them. Which is highly preferable to being confronted with code books and checklists provided by the Department of Food and Agriculture and the county Health Department.

Ultimately, Revolution is a book filled with hope. Others are telling us our food system is broken, while Sandor says, “Which one?” He pulls aside the curtain to reveal a complex web of food systems. They may not be sanctioned but they work, and will continue to do so for a long time.

The book is available at most bookstores, but the most pleasant place to purchase it is the tasting room of Preston Vineyards, 9282 West Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg.
Our calendar is a flexible and shifting document, so here is a heads-up about convivium events coming in this fall.

**October 11, 3 PM**

**ARK OF TASTE POTLUCK DINNER**

Medlock-Ames Winery
Chalk Hill Road, Healdsburg  
Cost: $35  
To register, e-mail Lisa Hunter: lkhunter@aol.com

**November 8–14**

**SONOMA-GUATEMALA FOOD TRADITIONS EXCHANGE**

- **November 8, 4 PM**  
  Reception for Ana Maria Chali Calan  
  Susan and Bill Daniels’ home, Santa Rosa
- **November 10, 5:30 PM**  
  Cooking Class & Meal  
  Relish, Healdsburg
- **November 14, 6 PM**  
  Meet-Up  
  Bill Hawn’s home, Cloverdale

**December 6,**

**HOLIDAY TAMALES** with Elissa Rubin-Mahon  
Jackie and Frank Denny’s house, Santa Rosa  
Cost & Time: TBD

**PLEASE NOTE:** Registration information for the above events will be emailed in October and November.