

Slow Food

BOULDER COUNTY



Slow Beginnings...

SLOW, a snail, a female snail...

Growing up in the south, snails were common. They were more like slugs. They left slime in their trail, that took forever to get from one side of the car port to the other. A favorite pastime was sprinkling salt on them to watch them shrink. It was a phenomenon.

Ray, a drop of golden sun...

It was hot in Alabama. Especially in the summer down at my Aunt Sarah's. Moving fast was not much of an option. It affected my speech and often kept me motionless on the porch for hours lost in a daydream. Time was long and slow. We used to make up stories. Spinning a tale was easy. Everything that came out of our mouths took three times the syllables. It was rather theatrical. We watched the corn grow. Then shucked it. Ate it right off the cob. Liquid sun exploded sweet juices right between our tender lips.

Me! a name I call myself...

I thought something was wrong with me when I moved west to Colorado. Everybody was moving so fast. It didn't take too long before I caught up to them. Then I wondered *what was all the fuss?*

Milan, a long, long way to run!...

I took a trip to Italy. Next thing I knew I was opening doors for Americans to learn something about Italian food. I met really nice people there who taught me well. I learned about the SLOW FOOD movement and how important it is to protect our local food traditions, especially when they're so unique. Not to mention how lively it was to sit around the table together eating and sharing stories.

Sew, a needle pulling thread...

Things started coming together. I was beginning to understand that not everyone had a SLOW background, but it seemed many people could relate to it and wanted to incorporate one. SLOW was a philosophy that could bring deeper meaning and purpose to one's life; as long as one was willing to slow down long enough to enjoy it. It was something I grew up with. I didn't want to lose this way of life, for myself, or any others that felt the same

way. Protection was needed. I became a new foot soldier for the 'SLOW FOOD movement.' An Italian inspiration. The word needed to be spread.

La, a note to follow 'sew'

'la' in Italian means 'over there.' It became obvious to me that this movement was destined for America. So, in '94, I brought it back to my home town. Boulder, Colorado. (The town I grew up in Alabama was already a card carrying member, unbeknownst to itself.)

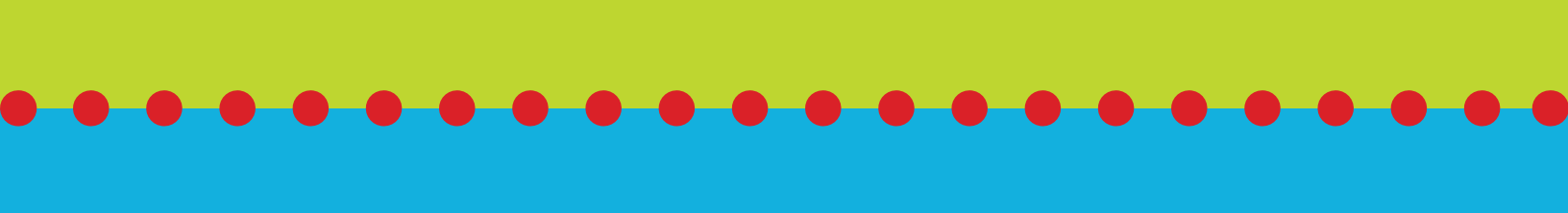
Tea! a drink with jam and bread...

(Nothing more slow than that.)

and that brings us back to SLOW, SLOW, SLOW, SLOW...

It was 1993 when I visited my friend Janet Hansen at her farmhouse in southern Tuscany. She had been living in Italy for 30 years. One day as we were making homemade pasta, a package arrived at the door. She opened it, and pulled out a tin with snail designs all over it and inside, were three bottles of wine. It sparked a story about this remarkable organization called SLOW FOOD, which she said was actually a movement started by some radical friends of hers that lived in Milan. "Radicals for the right reasons," she explained. We tried one of the bottles of wine for dinner. It was a new producer of an old single variety brought back to life. "Their guiding philosophy is leisureliness," she said, as we sipped the entire bottle at our leisure, "in protection to our rights to pleasure and a higher quality of life. In an age like ours where communication has become the driving impulse, 'SLOW people' feel the need to exchange ideas, information, and experience." I wanted to know more.

I found my chance at a Chianti Classico vertical wine tasting of old vintages in Florence. It was a day I will never forget. Carlo Patrini, head honcho of SLOW FOOD was there and gave a speech. I didn't expect to be so *wowed*. His passionate, down to earth enthusiasm spoke to my very soul. He sounded like a politician. He talked about the farmers, about the culture of Tuscany, about how important it is to bring awareness to the particulars of our food sources,



so that we don't lose precious tastes, precious species of animals, and precious time. I wanted to raise my hands in glory and say, "Yes! Carlo for President!" The movement was young, founded in 1989, yet it was growing by leaps and bounds. Carlo Patrini was Italy's answer to a guru with followers. Good food is not just fundamental there, it's a way of life.

Several events later I became a recognizable face. *Peggy, La Americana*. Not too long after, SLOW became international and they were ready to open up the United States. They wanted to go to Aspen to the Food and Wine festival. Many of SLOW's friends were going to show their wines, so they thought, why not us? They brought boxes of huge books entitled, *Guides to the Wines of the World*.

It was a beautiful book, in English, with information about SLOW on the last page. I met Roberto Burdese, Gianni Ruffa, Alfredo Bernoco and Stefano Eco in Aspen. It was the 'first' big foray into America. Stefano, Umberto Eco's son was living in New York at the time. He was instrumental in bringing the movement stateside.

Their big plan was to hand out the books at the entrance of the festival. Which they did. Too 'timido' to speak a word of English. They smiled and gave a book to any willing taker. I asked them, "How are you supposed to get the word out if you don't tell them who you are and why you are handing them this book?" They said, "Oh, it's fine. They can read on page 369, where they will find out exactly who we are." I said, "What makes you think they are going to get to page 369 of a guide book?" They were on a mission, Italian style.

I continued to spout the praises of Slow to the masses, students who came to my culinary programs in Italy and a handful of friends here in Boulder. I explained, 'It's not a club, or an association for profit. It's more of a celebration. It's a way to get together and share taste knowledge and 'convive'. In those days it was a \$80 fee to be a member, with 4 issues of year of SLOW magazine. \$60 went to the magazine and administration in Italy. \$20 stayed here for the convivium. It was a hard sell. I returned to attend more events in Italy. Boulder needed a convivium'. I needed to try harder to communicate.

I met Carlo the following year at VinItaly, Italy's grandest wine-tasting trade fair. Patrick Martins, an American, was apprenticing with SLOW at the time doing his thesis. He took me in to see Carlo. He said, "Carlo, you remember Peggy." Carlo said, "Peggy, Peggy


lei e una guercia!" (She's an oak!) I told him I was trying to start a convivium in Colorado, at that time it would have been the first, and what would he like for me to do? He said in his hoarse voice like the godfather, "Soce!" Members!

I left feeling like I was on a mission. A few years went by, and a handful of small meetings with friends were held. Membership was strained, as the fees were still a bit high for locals wanting to be involved in something so grass roots. Not to mention that we would often get ahead of ourselves wanting to encompass too much before we had a real foundation. I felt I was in over my head and I knew I needed help. Carlo needed 'soce'! (so-che).

My own business was growing in Italy and I was holding up to 16 programs a year for my Culinary Adventures in Tuscany and Sicily. My time and energy here in Colorado was waning. I asked Charlie Papazian, friend and America's most famous home-brewer to help me. Ever the philosopher, he was deeply in favor of what the movement was about.

The time had come to have a 'proper' convivium, even if it was only he and I. We wanted to bring the philosophy forward to honor the indigenous ones that came before us here in Colorado, namely the Arapaho Indians. Our first convivium was in Charlie's tee pee off Plateau Rd. We made a fire and drank gnarly-root home brew, respectfully toasting our ancestors. It was 1996, and we were written up in *SLOW Magazine*. We had surely but 'slowly' arrived. But, according to the guidelines, one was not an official convivium until one had 100 members. We had over 100 interested, but not 100 committed.

SLOW was growing at this point internationally and it was becoming a big success. They were now ready for America, and had appointed their American apprentice Patrick Martins as their head Ambassador and set him up in New York. He invited the most respected American food journalist and restaurateurs to Turin, for the grand 'Salone del Gusto.' I was an interpreter for several of them and tried to help them get along in Italy. Which is not easy for veteran New Yorkers like Jeffrey Steingarten, editor of *Vogue* and the author of *The Man Who Ate Everything*. I had to threaten to leave him on his own if he didn't behave. Behaving was not his forté, or his style. There is no one in America more certain that he knows everything than JS. And with that fact, I became very fond of him and his honesty I had the chance to get to know some of our brightest food writers on foreign soil. It helped put the food



'world' in perspective. Alice Waters, Deborah Madison and other trusted names that had already pioneered sustainable agriculture and supporting local farmers, were there (I had signed Deborah up on one of the Food and Wine Festivals in Aspen, where we actually had a booth and a sign up sheet. We finally had the lingo down!) The 'movement' was about to hit America like a storm.

Soon after Turin, article after article started showing up in all the major newspapers. SLOW FOOD was no longer an unknown word. *Slow what?* was making a wave that rolled across the sea like a tsunami, broke, then calmed and rolled all the way from New York to the coast of California. Conviviums started popping up like mushrooms, as the power of the media endorsed this awkward, but brilliant child, and she/he was orphaned no longer. I say she/he as we all know the symbol of SLOW is the snail. A hermaphrodite.

I was still the flame carrier here in Boulder, and needed a core group. Charlie, ever busy and traveling, was instrumental, but not able to lead. We began anew with a handful of enthusiasts who had either been to the 'Salone' or been inspired by the articles. Alan Ashurst, David Bloom, Jason McHugh and James Moore and I, all met at Sushi Tora one day at lunch time. Our steering committee was born.

All I can say is that it takes a long time for volunteer non-profits to proliferate. It finally caught fire and led eventually to a few great events and my acquiescing my leadership.

James Moore cared enormously for our convivium. He had spent weeks in Italy researching the roots of SLOW and wanted to take it on. He was present at the first international Convivium Leader Conference in California, where Alice Waters had become the spokesperson for America and SLOW's little darling. James' passion as a food scholar infused every event which was grounded in tandem with the expert attention and care of Leslie and Rob Justin, who organized, corresponded and administrated SLOW BOULDER into its present and proper fiscal form. Laura Bloom, Michele Wells, both original members and expert marketers, as well as Haystack dairy farmer Jim Schott, knew how to direct SLOW to support local growers and farmers to bring awareness to what is actually happening in Boulder County, and who needed our support.

Slow Boulder was now steaming. James felt it was time to move on, so the leadership needed to be crowned anew. Jo Ann Isenman of

Pharmaca stepped forth. Her experience and willingness to take it to its next level is equal to her 'joie du vivre' and we are all delighted. It takes a visionary to be the responsible volunteer of nonprofit, and she is one.

There are many people who are to thank for where it is today. Kathleen Trepp, with a strong background in the early burgeoning California culinary renaissance, has served to give an identity that goes confidently out into the community that we exist, Sylvia Tawse and Lyle Davis, who were great supporters from the beginning with *Field to Table*, continue to share their farm *Pastures of Plenty* every summer. The ever-smiling Chef Elizabeth Perreault had the heroic and responsible job of e-mail correspondence and other volunteers who come to the round table with our fearless leader Joanne, endlessly dreaming up the most delicious interesting conviviums to host, this side of Birmingham.

After all of this, we are not listed as the first convivium in America. But I know we are. I am at times regretful that I wasn't able to do more. In hindsight one can never underestimate the good intention of just planting a seed. Even if doesn't get the right amount of water right away, It lies dormant until the right cause and conditions allow it to ripen into what it is meant to be. I am happy that I was able to plant it.

I am content to be an international judge at 'SLOW Food Award'. It suits my lifestyle. And by the way, I am still putting salt on snails. But it's in a broth with a traditional spice mixture called 'ras al hanout,' at stand 3 in the 'Place Jma al Fna' in Marrakech.

— Peggy Markel