

Of Meals and Memories

We have no word for it in our language, so we give it little consideration. Our thoughts pass by it daily as we eat, dazed by the swirl of commerce, rushed by necessities of time, unplugged from the earth's cycles – the very source of our food. How did we forget these deep connections between food, earth, community and heritage? How do we recover what we ignore and give it value again?

Other languages hold hints about what's missing. The Spanish word *comida* is commonly translated as food or meal, but Gustavo Esteva explains that there is no way to translate *comida* into English. He says that *comida* has the same root as *comunidad* or community. How do you interpret community? The community that eats it, prepares it, grows it, or manufactures it? If our food is about community and earth then where are they, who comes to the table, who works in the gardens and fields, who nurtures the earth through those seasonal cycles that produce the food for our daily bread? (Gustavo Esteva is a Mexican Grassroots activist and "de-professionalized" intellectual.)

In Italian the "hinting words" are *sapere* (knowledge) and *sapere* (taste).

Carlo Petrini, "*In the Latin languages, the word sapere, which is taste, is very close to the word sapere, which is knowledge. But in English there are two words: taste and knowledge. In Italian it's sapere and sapere, because the knowledge of the taste is part of knowledge itself.*" (Carlo Petrini is founder to the Slow Foods Movement)

"The knowledge of taste is part of knowledge itself" – and this week I recovered my knowledge of the taste of beef liver from 50 years ago. I knew it was missing, but needed the right community to recover it. And I added to this the annual recovery of a new taste – the taste of Hopi Pumpkin. And for that too, I needed the right community.

Has this Master Gardener gone crackers? Too much time alone, sun-baked in the backyard garden of Eden? I think not. It's all quite simple and nearly mundane, except when I think about it within the context of our industrialized food system. Then it becomes the surprise gift of escape.

Last fall sometime, a new vendor showed up at the Downtown Farmers' Market and we discovered 'South of Santa Fe' and their grass-fed New Mexico beef. Clean, natural and local (raised in Cloudcroft, butchered in W. Texas). One chuck roast was all it took to change our beef buying patterns for the better. The next week I inquired about stew bones and liver – spurred on by my home cooked food memories from the '40s. The bones were easy and incredibly delicious/nutritious, the liver took until last week and boy was it worth the wait.

Garden grown Stockton Yellow Onions, sautéed to golden caramel with chunks of Romanian Red Garlic (of course garden grown) and honestly the best liver you'll ever eat. Perfection found with a rush of memory and knowledge of how food should taste. And if you can stand even more – add a side dish of Hopi Pumpkin. Young green and cooked with fresh English Thyme until translucent and served with a dash of butter, salt and pepper. This is the stuff that makes one meal memorable in a lifetime of eating.

Last year I discovered Hopi Pumpkin, thanks to the folks at Native Seed SEARCH and my own curiosity. Planted it, discovered when to harvest and how to cook it and fell in love with the taste and satisfaction of it. Now it's an annual summer and fall food that I either grow myself or do without – small chance of that!

And so, one more Slow Food dinner in a lifetime of meals, completely local and full of unique *community, taste and knowledge*. Doesn't get any better than that!

Till next month,

Darrol Shillingburg
Master Gardener Intern
(e-version on the web at www.darrolshillingburg.com)

Eat Local - Grow Your Own