

CHOW Line

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C.

November 2009

Volume XIV, Number 3

Calendar of CHoW Meetings

December 13

Nongkran Daks, "Beyond Curry & Pad Thai: Regional Thai Cuisine"

January 10, 2010

Tom Weiland, "The Search for the Elusive Schnitzel"

February 14

Nancy Baggett, "Evolution of the Romantic Shape and Flavors of Valentine Confections"

March 4

Special Tour: Library of Congress's rare book holdings on gastronomy by Mark Dimunation, Chief, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, The Library of Congress. Thursday, 4:00 p.m.

March 14

Fred Czarra, "Spices of Life: The Savory Story of the First Global Marketplace"

April 11

Cooperative Supper (Note: time change 4 to 6 p.m.)

May 2

Barbara G. Carson, "Ambitious Appetites" — political aspects on dining in D.C. during the Federal period. (Note: first Sunday)

Curating Culinary Exhibits for Museums: Behind the Scenes

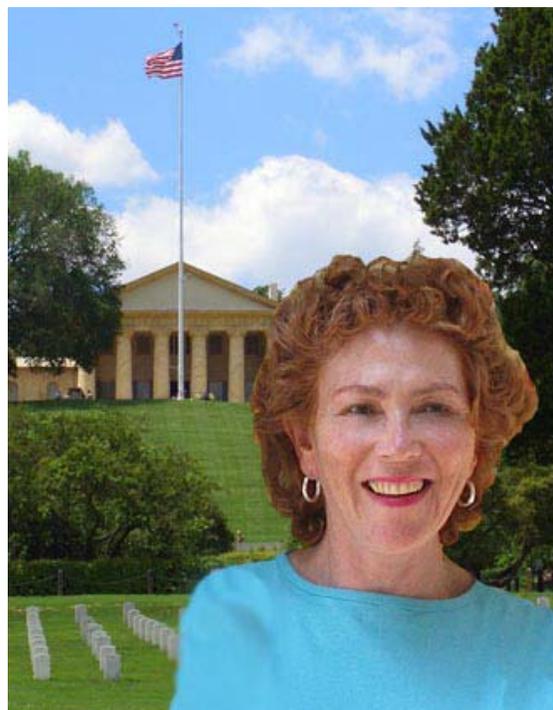
Speaker: Joan Bacharach

Sunday, November 8, 2009

2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Joan Bacharach, curator with the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) museum program, will give a behind-the-scenes look at the challenges of planning and developing culinary exhibits in museums, historic house museums, and virtual exhibits. She will project images of a wide variety of exhibits and collections from the U.S. National Park Service and other venues in which she has had a part; from Anasazi Chaco to Arlington House (at left), and from Mary Lincoln to Mamie Eisenhower.

Joan began her museum career at the Museum of Man and Science in Johannesburg, South Africa. She worked for over 10 years at the California Academy of Sciences (CAS) in San Francisco, first in the exhibits and then the Department of Anthropology. Joan curated the ethnographic collections



including the Rietz Food Technology collection, initiated the CAS Foodways Symposium series, developed exhibits, and also did field work in KwaZulu-Natal and northern Tanzania.

Joan moved to Washington, DC and is a curator with the NPS museum program that has over 350 park museums nationwide. She develops virtual museum exhibits and historic house tours in collaboration with parks. She is committed to showcasing the remarkable NPS collections, especially the foodways from the homes of Mary Todd Lincoln, Bess Truman, the Robert E. Lees, as well as Alcatraz inmates and others.

She developed sub-Saharan African recipes for the American Heart Association and taught a South African cooking class. Joan develops public programs and coordinated many regional cuisine programs for The Smithsonian Associates — including a traditional African banquet at the Embassy of South Africa. She is a member of Les Dames d'Escoffier and CHoW.



Cornflower china used at Arlington House was the same pattern used by Robert E. Lee, Jr.

Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C. (CHoW/DC)

founded in 1996, is an informal, nonprofit, educational organization dedicated to the study of the history of foodstuffs, cuisines, and culinary customs, both historical and contemporary, from all parts of the world.

www.chowdc.org

What Happened at the October 11 Meeting?

October Treasurer's Report

From Treasurer **Bruce Reynolds** who could not attend the October CHoW meeting.

Since our last meeting, renewals and new memberships totaling \$625 have been received, and deposited. There has been only one expenditure - an honorarium for our "Webmaster," who in addition to keeping our site up and in good order, also rescued us from a situation over the summer in which the site was shut down briefly.

As a result, our cash balance stands at \$4755 before any expenses resulting from the current meeting.

If you have not renewed your membership for the current year, it is important to do so as soon as possible. The business reason for this focus on early renewals is very simple: the Board needs to know what the financial situation for this year will be as early as possible in the year. Last month, I reported that our operations last year resulted in a deficit of about \$400. That translates into 20 members at last year's dues level. Given the economy of the last 12 months, it is not at all unlikely that some people who are not active members might choose to economize by dropping their membership in our organization. To put that 20-member number into perspective, we have so far this fiscal year acquired 4 new members.

Since our largest expenses - printing & mailing *CHoW Line*, renting our meeting space, and honoraria for speakers and other services, such as our Web site - are "fixed," budget shortfalls will have to be addressed to avoid running a chronic deficit. While we have some cash reserve from prior years, that is our "rainy day fund," and we cannot keep using it to fund current operations on a continuing basis.

So in the words of the movie Jerry McGuire of a few years ago, "Show me the money."



Patrick Evans-Hylton and CHoW Vice President CiCi Williamson

Wine in Virginia

"In 10 to 12 years, I predict that just as Oregon is known for *Pinot Noir*, Virginia will be known for its *Viognier*," predicted Patrick Evans-Hylton, Executive Editor, *Virginia Wine Lover Magazine*, who spoke about the history of wine in Virginia. That *Viognier* (vee-oh-NYAY) — an esteemed French white-wine grape considered very rare because of its limited plantings, low yield and susceptibility to vineyard diseases — would grow well in Virginia is astounding, given the 400 years of mostly failed attempts to grow *Vitis vinifera* (VEE-tihhs vihn IHF-uh-ruh), the European vine species that produces over 99% of the world's wines today.

A 20-year Virginia resident who learned his love of cooking from his Atlanta grandmother, Patrick began his talk discussing the Jamestown colonists' first attempts in 1609 to make palatable wine from native Virginia Scuppernong grapes. "Great for eating but not for wine because of their resulting 'foxy' taste."

Patrick led us on a four-century journey of winemaking in the Old Dominion. His itinerary galloped through Charles Carter's Rappahannock River plantation, Mr. Jefferson's neighborhood, Philip Mazzei's Albemarle County acreage, Dr. D.N. Norton's Richmond farm (he of the namesake Norton grape still made into "Virginia claret" today), and the dry years of Prohibition, pausing at 1960 to eat a few table grapes from the 15 acres that encompassed the total of Virginia plantings at that time.

Finally, he told of two 1970s "pioneers," Charles Raney of Farfelu Vineyard and Dr. Archie Smith, Jr., of Meredyth Vineyard, who successfully grew French hybrids. Patrick mentioned how Virginia Tech Professor and Enology Specialist Bruce Zoecklein and State Viticulturist Tony Wolf helped Virginia wine-grape growers triumph over the state's hot, humid climate with its occasional late or early frosts, pests, and fungi to produce world-class wines.

Those 15 acres of table grapes have been supplanted in 2009 by over 3,000 acres of vineyards and 180 wineries. "Today," concluded Patrick, "Virginia is considered one of the best places in the world for future vineyard development."



Patrick signing a copy of his book, *Popcorn*, for Clara Raju.

More information:

www.virginiawinelover.com (*Virginia Wine Lover Magazine*) where Patrick Evans-Hylton is the Executive Editor. He is also Senior Editor, Food & Wine, of *Hampton Roads Magazine*, www.hamptonroadsmagazine.com. To contact him, email Patrickevanshylton@gmail.com.

—CiCi Williamson

GENERAL MEETING MINUTES

The Meeting was called to order by President **Katherine Livingston**. There were 36 members and guests in attendance.

Announcements: **Katy Hayes** stated that an “announcements only” e-mail listserv for CHoW members will begin in about a month. If you don’t want to be on the listserv just e-mail any Board member. Details will be in next month’s newsletter.

Bryna Freyer announced that The Library of Congress is in the initial planning stages of a project to revise the subject headings treatment for cooking and cookbooks. A discussion paper has been posted at <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsocooking.pdf> Interested parties are invited to send comments on these plans to Libby Dechman at edec@loc.gov The deadline for comment is December 1, 2009.

Whatzits: **Bryna** brought in a silver plated corn on the cob holder. **Patrick Evans-Hylton**, our speaker, brought in an empty 1892 scuppernong wine bottle from Garrett & Co. of the Berkley Plantation area of Virginia, brand name “Virginia Dare.”

Program: **CiCi Williamson**, CHoW Vice-President, introduced today’s speaker, Patrick Evans-Hylton.

Refreshments:

- **Kari Barrett** brought Cheese Straws from *The Gift of Southern Cooking*, 2003, by Edna Lewis and Scott Peacock
- **Francine Berkowitz** brought Almond Windmill Cookies
- **Kathleen Carrington** brought Virginia Peanut Soup
- **Katy Hayes** brought Indian Pound Cake from *The Kentucky Housewife*, 1847, by Lettice Bryan
- **Phyllis Krochmal** brought Cocoa Brownies
- **Claudia Kousoulas** brought four bottles of white wine and fruit juice infusions: Peach, Orange, Lemon Bay and Honeydew Peppercorn (see her article at right)
- **Zina Pisarko** brought the ingredients for open face sandwiches: sourdough bread, fresh mozzarella, olive oil, tomatoes, two basils and black salt
- **Clara Raju** brought Baked Olive Cheese Balls
- **Amy Snyder** brought French Truffles

LAST CALL FOR DUES!

December 31 is the last day to pay dues if you wish to be included in the CHoW Roster mailed to all members in January!

Ratafia

By **Claudia Kousoulas**



It’s hard to put a single definition on ratafias. Depending on the cook, era, or region, they are made with fruit and wine or brandy. There is even debate over the origin of the name. Some claim it is a Creole word, others say it comes from the Latin, *rata fiat* (to ratify), to recognize the shared drink that would seal a ratified treaty, which sounds awfully coincidental. To complicate things, many British and early American cookbooks define ratafias as biscuits, most often an almond cookie.

In what is considered the earliest American cookbook, *The Virginia House-wife*, Mary Randolph includes ratafias flavored with currants, rose leaves, ginger, and hydromel (honey) in her chapter with recipes for soaps and beers, part of a well-stocked pantry.

In *The Complete Confectioner* (1864), Philadelphia author Eleanor Parkinson describes ratafias as “liquors made by the infusion of the ingredients in spirits, and are similarly composed to the spirituous waters, but instead of being distilled, they are simply filtered, and sugar is added to them.”

Ratafia seems to be most strongly a French tradition. Mirielle Johnson, in *Cuisine of the Sun*, calls them *Boissons de Menage*—household liquors. She recalls how they are used as gentle restoratives, prescribed for everything from growing pains to spring fever.

Parkinson’s definition explains why ratafias are perfect for household production, simple infusion. Her flavor recommendations include cherries, orange flower water, noyaux (nuts—usually green walnuts), clove pinks, and angelica.

And while the perfume of a single, seasonal fruit can be captured in a ratafia, consider combinations of fruits, spices, and herbs, parsley, mint, basil, and anise, can add dimension to ratafia, just as they do in cooking.

Ratafia Recipes

- Mix and steep the ratafia in a large, wide-mouth glass jar.
- Use the vanilla bean sparingly, it should mellow the fruit essence without overpowering.
- Johnson also calls these “*liqueurs de fenetre*,” windowsill liquors where they are often put to mellow, but the fridge or a cool closet works as well.

Basic recipe:

1 to 2	cups of cut up fruits, vegetables, herbs
1/4	cup white sugar
1/4	cup unflavored vodka
1	inch of vanilla bean, split lengthwise
1	(750-liter) bottle of wine

- Mix the ingredients, lightly crushing the fruits, vegetables, or herbs and dissolving the sugar.
- Seal and store in the refrigerator, occasionally stirring or agitating the jar, for 3 to 4 weeks.
- Filter the liquid through cheesecloth set in a fine sieve and decant the liquor into a sealed bottle.

CHoW Field Trip to Alexandria Archaeology Museum



Shirley Cherkasky and Anna Lynch, Alexandria Archaeology Museum Educator

By Shirley Cherkasky

On October 17 CHoW members gathered at the Alexandria Archaeology Museum to enjoy a presentation by Anna Lynch, Museum Educator, who has participated for many years in the museum's archaeological digs as well as researched written and graphic documents to uncover Alexandria's history.

Beginning her account of the early 19th-century sugar refining industry, she illustrated her talk with examples of various forms of sugar (sugar cane, a corn husk-wrapped packet of muscovado -- a corruption of the Spanish *mas cabado*, meaning "more processed") and samples of later stages in the refining process (molasses, brown sugar, and granular white sugar pressed into a cone and wrapped in blue paper).

Cuban coins and other objects excavated at the Sugar House site indicate that the source of the muscovado was probably Cuba. She showed illustrations of the Sugar House exterior, the slave labor at work at the boiling vats, and photos of household sugar chests to safeguard the very expensive refined white sugar.

The muscovado was refined by boiling it in huge vats of water, with bullocks' blood added to capture the impurities that then were skimmed off. We examined pot shards of both unglazed sugar molds and glazed syrup jars. The cones had a very small hole in the tip to drain the molasses into the syrup jars. Cones ranged in size depending on the consumers' needs. Boiling, skimming, and draining were repeated until the desired degree of purity was achieved.

Another topic of interest were the bakeries that were so successful, especially in the early 19th century while Alexandria was still a part of the District of Columbia. They produced large quantities of ship biscuit (hardtack or seabiscuits) to supply the numerous ships docking at Alexandria's wharves and also produced elaborate pastries for household use throughout the area. One of the bakeries, Jamieson's, which acquired a reputation for producing fine crackers as well, remained in business for almost a hundred years after its establishment in 1785. Another business advertised that it offered an illuminated space adorned with artworks which patrons could enjoy while consuming their sweets.

An account written after the Civil War by a woman named Slacum who grew up in Alexandria in the early 19th century recently has come to light and has been transcribed to reveal, among other subjects, her descriptions of cooking and dining practices during her early life, including visits to George Washington's descendants at Mount Vernon.

Moon Cookie History, Continued

By CiCi Williamson

The "Whatzits" I brought to the September CHoW meeting have now been identified as Moon Cake Cookie Molds. The cookies' involvement in Chinese politics follows; however, other legends exist on aspects of these cookies, which are an essential element of celebrating the autumn harvest Chinese Asian Moon Festival. In 2009, the The Moon festival (also called the Mooncake or Mid-Autumn festival) fell on October 3.

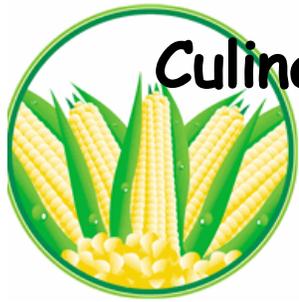
During the Yuan dynasty (A.D.1280-1368) China was ruled by the Mongolian people. Leaders from the preceding Sung dynasty (A.D.960-1280) were unhappy at submitting to foreign rule, and set about coordinating a rebellion without it being discovered. The leaders of the rebellion, knowing that the Moon Festival was drawing near, ordered the making of special cakes. Baked into each moon cake was a message with the outline of the attack. On the night of the Moon Festival, the rebels successfully attacked and overthrew the government. What followed was the establishment of the Ming dynasty (A.D. 1368-1644). Today, moon cakes are eaten to commemorate this legend.

CHoW member **Amy Riolo** e-mailed to me, "I saw in the October *CHoW Line* that you brought the Chinese Cookie Molds to the last meeting. They are very similar to Arab Ma'moul (Date Dome) molds, which I have scores of. I believe the Ma'moul molds were in existence at least by 9th century AD. Do you have any idea when the Chinese ones were used? It would be fun to see if they started in Middle East and went Eastward with Moguls or did they originate in China?"

So far, I haven't been able to determine how long Moon Cookies have been made. Has anyone else? Recipes for them abound on the Internet, and all agree that the dough should not contain leavening so



they will retain their shapes from the molds. However, ingredients vary widely. Besides lotus seed paste, other traditional fillings include red bean paste, black bean paste, adzuki beans, lard, flour and nuts. More elaborate versions of mooncakes contain four egg yolks (representing the four phases of the moon).



Culinary Humor

By Tom Weiland

From the book *Colchester Oyster Feast* (1902) by W. Gurney Benham.

Colchester, somewhat Northeast of London, traces its history at least back to the Roman Empire. Julius Caesar is thought to have visited here in his campaigns to conquer ancient Britain. Colchester also appears to be the origin of the stories of Old King Cole and Humpty Dumpty. Depending on whose interpretation of history you accept, the Feast dates back to Medieval times, perhaps to the early 1300's, and through the choppy waves of time, has developed from a commoner's faire into a gala event for Britain's upper crust. Bone dry wit, mass quantities of oysters, and more than a modicum of spirituousa have combined to produce some rather amusing toasts and cartoons.

At right are the lines written by a Mr. Egerton-Green, to accompany the cartoons in the attached photo. Historical notes: The alluded-to Town Hall was actually a ship, which was towed and sunk by a new steam dredger, the "Pyefleet," which became responsible for maintenance of the Oyster fishery. The "Temeraire" was a British warship which fought alongside Nelson's "Victory" at Trafalgar. J.M.W. Turner immortalized the scuttling of the Temeraire in an 1838 painting.

Tom Weiland has been cooking since the age of eight, has a wicked sense of humor and will be CHoW's speaker on January 10 on the topic "The Search for the Elusive Schnitzel."

More Culinary Humor from CHoW Members

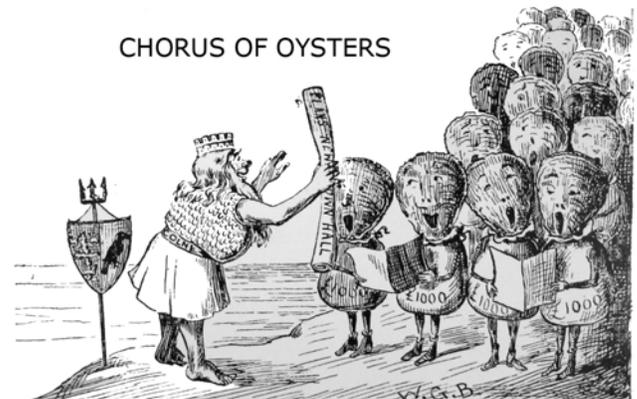
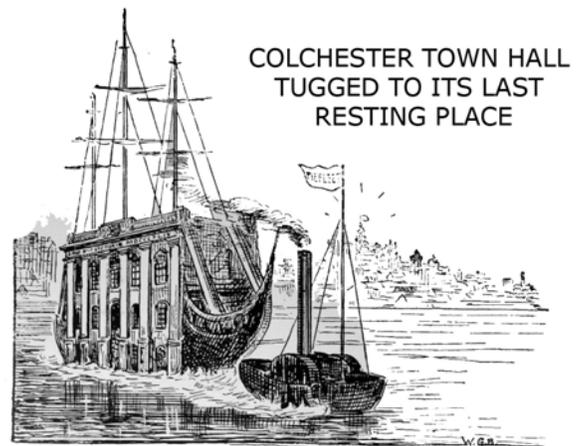
Send your culinary humor contributions to tuckking@aol.com

Janet Dinerman sent us a Scottish toast that has become a family favorite:

Here's tae us! Wha's like us?
Dam foo and they're all deed.

CiCi Williamson sends some culinary trivia:

- 1.) What fruit did the Visigoths demand in ransom when they laid siege to Rome in A.D. 408?
- 2.) What product was introduced in Japanese supermarkets after a survey showed half the country's young people weren't able to use chopsticks?
- 3.) The pretzel shape created by French monks in 610 A.D. was designed to depict what? (answers in column 2)



SKETCHES FROM THE OYSTER FEAST TOAST LIST OF OCTOBER 22, 1895. (MR. CLAUDE E. EGERTON-GREEN, J.P., D.L., MAYOR)

THE TOWN HALL

(loquitor) Full fifty year have I stood here.
Though highly rated, ne'er first-rate;
My Jubilee is but to me
The death-knell of my coming fate.
I've felt the shake of the earth's dread quake,
I've borne the blast of fire and weather,
I'm wholly cracked, and as a fact
My timbers scarce hold me together.
'Tis time I went, ere more is spent
On patching, painting, and repair;
Come Pyefleet, come and tow me home,
Like Mr. Turner's "Temeraire."

CHORUS OF OYSTERS

Ye natives of Colchester—natives of Colne,
What you've done for their comfort would gratefully own;
As you gave us the Pyefleet to keep our beds clean,
So we'll give you a building that's fit to be seen.
From our cloister of cultch and the culture we rise,
And we bring you the means to promote this emprise.
True, to build a Town Hall is a curious art,
But you'll find that we oysters are ready to part
With our shells, with our beards, with our lives, with our all;
So you shall not shell out for your own new Town Hall.

Trivia answers: 1.) 3,000 pounds of peppercorns -- a highly valued spice at that time; 2.) Trainer chopsticks with finger loops; 3.) A little child's arms in prayer.



Food and Film

By Marsha Weiner



Food has been on movie screens since the beginning of the film industry. Food has been a prop in slapstick, satire, and comedy — with lots of flying cream pies and memorable meals such as that shoestring spaghetti dinner in Charlie Chaplin's *Gold Rush*. Food has provided dramatic beats— for example James Cagney squeezing that grapefruit in Mae Clark's face in *Public Enemy*— and food has succinctly shown dramatic development, as in the poignant, silent ritual of breakfast father and son mastered with, and for, one another in *Kramer vs. Kramer*.

Nothing establishes cultural identity on the screen as quickly and as powerfully as food seen in films such as Ang Lee's *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman*; Stanley Tucci's *Big Night* and all of those *family* dinners in the *Godfather* films. And of course, there is a long list of films where food is used in love and seduction: *Mostly Martha*, *Annie Hall*, *Like Water for Chocolate*, the nearly reverential *Babette's Feast*, and, of course, the sensual banquet scene in Tony Richardson's *Tom Jones*.

Film historian Ken Weiss and food promoter Steve Zimmerman have produced a book that traces the use of food in film from the silent era to the present. Their book, *Food in the Movies*; (McFarland & Company, 2005) catalogs over 500 American and foreign films and describes how food has been used as prop, transition device, symbol and metaphor. The authors identify the 1980s as the decade when the use of food in cinema made a major shift and began appearing in the starring role.

Their careful exploration reveals some of the tricks and cinematic magic that directors have developed to get around the added expense and inconvenience of using food, including deceiving the audience to believe food was served and consumed when, in fact, on careful viewing you realize food was not even visible.

Though their catalog of film is extensive, it's quite possible you won't find your favorites mentioned. Two of my personal favorite scenes of food in film that aren't mentioned are the sweet intimacy of Mia Farrow and Woody Allen eating Chinese takeout while watching old movies and that quiet, delicious shot of Denzel Washington (Joe Miller) sneakily eating a sandwich in the law library when he begins to realize the validity of the HIV discrimination case of Tom Hanks (Andrew Beckett) in Jonathan Demme's *Philadelphia*.

Food and film seem to be experiencing a tipping point, evolving into the distinct genre called culinary cinema. The 2007 Berlin International Film Festival featured a break out series, *Eat, Drink, Watch Movies*, showing a variety of fiction and documentaries from around the world. The success of

those screenings inspired the creation of The Academy of Food and Cinema at the Cineteca de Bologna, which, since 2006, has had an annual food and film festival.

Aside from *Ratatouille* and *Julie and Julia*, there has been an explosion of American documentaries striving to galvanize and focus the public's attention of America's troubled food system, the calamity of modern American industrial agriculture and the consequences for people's health, and the sustainability of environmental resources. *The Future of Food*, *Dirt*, *Broken Limbs*, *King Corn*, *Food, Inc.* are just some of the American documentaries which have been shown on television and in mainstream movie houses.

In Washington, DC during the summer months, the Letelier Theater on Prospect Place opens its doors so that organizations working on issues related to local food and sustainable agriculture can host informal screenings of films accompanied with tastings of local foods.

This past July, Food Muse Media hosted a screening and included a variety of short films from around the world:

Culinary Heritage: A LOVE SUPREME; British architect Nilesh Patel's charming homage to his mother and her homemade samosas

Food System: COWS ARE NICE; Insight into how European Union regulations have impacted a small, organic Swedish dairy

Food, Memory, Love, Loss: WE ARE WHAT WE LOST; Gorgeous Serbian short film shows the ritual power of food to honor loss and love

Farm to Table: EAT AT BILL'S; Lisa Brenneis' (grower of Pixie Tangerine in Ojai, CA) delightful portrait of an eclectic produce market in Berkeley

In 2010 Food Muse Media will host a screening of *Pranzo di Ferragosto*, winner of the Golden Snail (best in show) at the last food and film festival in Bologna, Italy. This charming feature length (fiction) film features five very senior women in the care of a middle aged man during the August holiday season in Rome. He manages their temperaments and their process of becoming friends with a good humor and food. The screening in Washington will be co-sponsored with the National Center on Creative Aging.

Marsha Weiner, President of Food Muse Media, puts on food and film events and is a voting member of the Academy of Food and Film, former Regional Governor of Slow Food USA and Chair Emeritus of Slow Food USA Ark of Taste.