

Rumblings from the World of Food



A Parting Glass

POLLY ADEMA

We mourn the loss of writer and wine educator Brian H. Smith, who died on December 30, 2009. Born, raised, and educated in London, Brian received a master's degree from Queen Elizabeth College, University of London. Having developed an early passion for all things French, and for food and wine in particular, he had the great good fortune to work with wine most of his life. And a wonderful life it was.

It is for Brian's contributions to the world of wine that he will be most widely remembered and most sorely missed. Over the years Brian traveled to most of the world's wine-producing regions, where he met some of the finest people on the planet and who later became his friends. His long-time association with the Society of Wine Educators (SWE) was a natural extension of those friendships. Brian was a frequent presenter at SWE meetings, most recently sharing his

ongoing affection for and research into the nuances of Sancerre wines. His eloquence was recorded here, in the pages of *Gastronomica* ("Solving the Puzzle of Barolo and Barbaresco," February 2005), as well as in wine-industry magazines and several important books. Brian authored two editions of *The Sommelier's Guide to Wine* (2003, 2008) and together with his colleagues at the Culinary Institute of America coauthored the acclaimed textbook *Exploring Wine*, the third edition of which will be released later this year. *WineWise*, a consumer-friendly version of this textbook, won the prestigious James Beard Award 2009 for Best Beverage Book and the George Duboeuf Wine Book of the Year Award, 2009.

For the last twenty-two years Brian enjoyed a career as Professor of Wine Studies at the Culinary Institute of America. He influenced thousands of students, many of whom now inhabit the kitchens, dining rooms, and wine rooms of the world's finest restaurants. His devotion to wine education and his love for the vine live on in his students and in those who read his words.

Brian died as he lived, quietly, with a glass of sparkling wine near at hand. Prior to his death he made his final wish known: in celebration of his life, he requested that friends and colleagues raise a glass of sparkling wine and drink to all that he enjoyed. Cheers to you, Brian!

Life Lessons

DEAN CRAWFORD

The third annual Kneading Conference in Skowhegan, Maine, was that much-anticipated event in human history, a reconciliation of science and religion. It was held under three tents, one of them big enough to hold us all, bread bakers and oven crafters, pastry chefs and wheat farmers, medicine men and plant geneticists. We were a wholesome crowd, most of us firing our ovens with wood and mixing our doughs from the best whole grains and organic flours. King Arthur flour was our standard but not our scripture. Many of the conference participants were pure enough to mill their own flours, some even to grow their own grains from heritage seeds. And yet there were no Puritans among us, no Cotton Mathers scowling at the less holy bakers. We all got along. We ate together at long tables, and the food was terrific.

Skowhegan is located in inland Maine on the gushing Kennebec River. Its architecture is American Utilitarian; its history, mainly working class, with jobs at its many mills, making paper, flooring, woolens, and shoes. The site of the conference's tents was the back lot of the Skowhegan Federated Church, which seemed like a fitting place to come together, given the motto of the Federated Church, "diverse in opinion,

united in Christ." Handmade bread was our Christ, but not our Eucharist; it was baked to taste delicious. The conference was organized around a series of individual presentations, all of them technical as well as profound, like life lessons.

Sacred Plants, Shared Seeds, and Kernels. One of the keynote speakers was Albie Barden, an ordained Episcopal priest also trained in Native American plant medicine. Albie exhorted us "to reconnect to the plant world on the spiritual level" through the use of sacred plants such as sweetgrass, which has the power of protection according to Native American tradition; birch bark, which is useful for canoes, kindling, buckets, and shelter; maple syrup, a gift freely given to us by the tree; tobacco, which is powerful both as a gift and a thing to share; and local raw milk, which is more natural and nutritious. He was particularly impassioned about the importance of "sacred corn," by which he meant the native varieties whose kernels could also be shared. In fact, he passed around blue Hopi corn ears, allowing us to break off kernels and encouraging us to pull off a strand of corn silk, each a literal link to a kernel. Several people in the audience called out "Amen!" as Albie spoke, but he wasn't preaching. He was offering us something. To whatever extent modern life alienates us from the land and from our native heritage, Albie's sacred plants offer to heal us, nutritionally as well as spiritually.

Plant the Best Seeds for Future Generations. A second keynote speaker was Glenn Roberts, who founded Anson Mills in Charleston, South Carolina, where he grows, harvests, and mills several nearly extinct varieties of heirloom corn, rice, and wheat that once formed the basis of the Southern diet before the Civil War.



Above: A Danish braid takes shape at the Kneading Conference.

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Glenn's goal is really the ultimate in *Getting Back to Basics*, as Anson Mills now produces an original strain of Carolina Gold rice, a "Thirteen Colonies" wheat called Red May, and a collection of heirloom grains from elsewhere in the world, including Japanese buckwheat, French oats, an Italian farro, and even a Fertile Crescent wheat. Glenn presents himself primarily as a restorationist. He mentioned the Southern tradition of planting a pecan tree not for oneself but for one's grandchildren, since the pecan takes sixty-five years to bear.

You Can Have It All. Cyril Hitz, master baker, author, and professor of baking/pastry at Johnson and Wales University, presented two technical demonstrations on pre-ferments and creative shaping techniques. But his real message was that you don't have to sacrifice beauty for other benefits. Your breads and rolls can have it all, including not just nutrition, but beautiful appearance, elasticity, strength, and a great soft taste with the lactic notes of a fine brioche. Too often, he said, we confuse wholesomeness and

homeliness. Cyril asked us to strive for everything equally: nutrition and taste and appearance. Furthermore, he showed us how.

Don't Take Your Frustrations Out on Your Dough. Richard Miscovich, who operates an artisanal bakery in Beaufort, North Carolina, and is also on the faculty at Johnson and Wales, offered an amazing workshop on artisan techniques for wood-fired baking, including all the steps for making the perfect sourdough loaf. His presentation was largely chemistry and physics—grams of ingredients and narrow temperature ranges for each rise, along with precise instructions about kneading and folding the dough. But perhaps his greater lesson was in the Zen of his movements and in his sage advice: "Kneading bread isn't therapy and it isn't boxing. Don't take your frustrations out on your dough."

Turbulence of Flow. Dusty Dowse's workshop on heat management was part physics, part metaphor, and only an apparent oxymoron. He stressed the importance of building

the fire and directing the air to create a ragged, uneven current of air through the combustion, which he called "turbulence of flow." The aim, he explained, is to shape the fire to spread heat throughout the whole oven cavity and to burn the wood efficiently. Smooth fires are localized and lazy. They don't move around, leaving some of the wood unconsumed and some parts of the oven relatively unheated, with hot spots that can char the bottom of a loaf without your noticing. Dusty offered a lot of useful, practical advice, but he also provided an interesting metaphor for bread baking, which isn't a placid or passive art, but a vigorous activity. We may begin with the

gentle act of engaging the plants on a spiritual level, but we then hack the plants down, thresh them, grind them, muscle the dough into releasing their glutens, and finally subject our loaves to nature's most violent transformer, the power stolen by Prometheus from the gods, fire.

The fourth annual Kneading Conference will take place in Skowhegan, Maine, July 29-30, 2010. For more information visit www.kneadingconference.com.

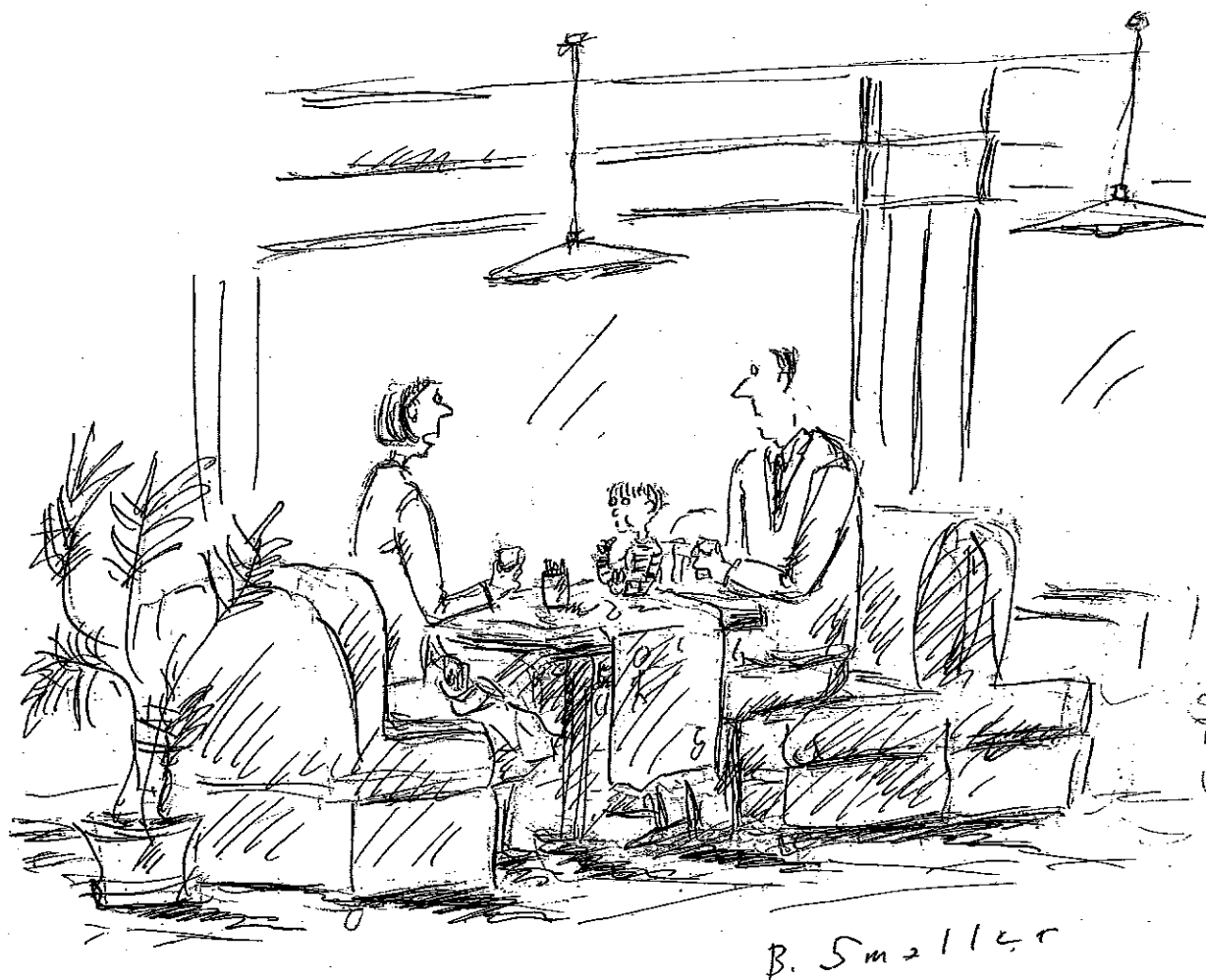
At the Table in Beirut

KAMAL MOUZAWAK

Tawlet ("table," in Arabic) is the latest venture of Souk el Tayeb, Lebanon's

first farmer's market. It was created to celebrate the culinary traditions that unite communities and support small-scale farmers and producers who practice sustainable agriculture.

Since 2004 Beirut's Souk el Tayeb has evolved from a small, experimental market to a vibrant organization that works nationally and internationally to preserve and promote Lebanon's culinary heritage. The original weekly market brought produce from the countryside to the city, where economic demand and purchasing power were high: it was a rural to urban model. But even though fresh fruits, vegetables, breads, and preserves were sold, there was no regional cuisine—home-cooked meals were not feasible



Don't let him fill up on crayons before the entree arrives.