

In Food We Trust

When you are in Tuscany (and in the Garfagnana, as I frequently am), what do you do when you are not visiting the excellent restaurants, many featured in *Grapevine*, and the incomparable array of art and artefacts which afford such pleasure to us all in this part of the world? Lucca and its surroundings are indeed balm for the weary soul. But when you're not out and about, you can do what all Italians do in small places (not so sure about big cities where they may have lost the habit). They do a daily shop for fresh locally grown produce (*nostrali*) available in season, displayed on stalls and in shops where you can pick and choose what you will, take it home and cook up your own storm. My local greengrocer Michele is a welcoming daily presence, telling what's good today. The other week he had a huge pumpkin from somebody's garden on his counter by the till, and he cut us off a big piece to roast at home. He has the most lovely tomatoes, chard (*bietola*) in profusion (great for green juices), many other vegetables, plus fruits grown and picked locally, including *mirtilli* which are freshly gathered with special little tine forks from the local hills. All this is laid out without any packaging, so you have the freedom to pick up, to smell, to feel for ripeness.

While this has always been important for me, after a cancer diagnosis I set up a site www.cansurviving.com to help others to continue to live vibrantly after the trauma of such an event. It is now nearly a year old, has 104 members, nearly 10,000 visitors a month, and an international reach. Do use it and pass on to those who might also find it useful.

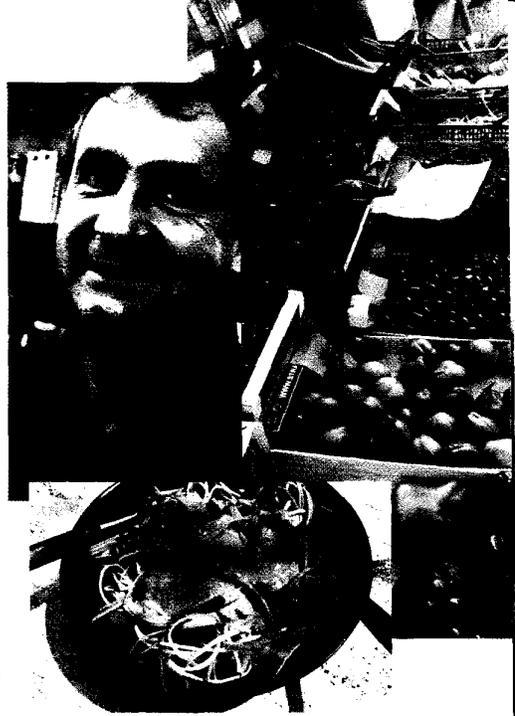
It has lots of recipes in the body section (there are also forums for the mind and the spirit – the site is built by all its members).

Here is one recipe which has made good use of Michele's wonderful tomatoes this summer, a raw sauce if you are eating raw for your health. The ingredients can be altered to your taste in terms of quantities:

All you do is put in your small food processor some very roughly chopped ripe tomatoes (Michele's have been excellent for this), also walnuts (almonds are good too), again roughly chopped, lots of basil leaves, a small chilli (or more to taste) and olive oil. Whizz it all up – leave it quite rough, it does not need to be super-smooth – add Himalayan salt to taste, and use this as a raw sauce either for cooked pasta or for spiralised vegetables such as courgettes and carrots if you want a totally raw meal.

A dear friend gave me a little book for my birthday: *Proverbi e modi di dire contadini: Filosofia, Scienza, Fede, distillate nel tempo* (Local proverbs and sayings on various subjects, collected over many years.). In it I found this gem: *Mangia bene e caga forte e non aver paura della morte*. I looked up *caga* in my trusty dictionary – no luck. So I took the book round to my 95-year-old neighbour Irma, who read it aloud and laughed uproariously. *Caga* it turns out, is the word for – let's say it in its crude form – shit. So the proverb says, in effect, "eat well and shit well, and you need not fear death." This is down-to-earth peasant wisdom. And to quote Hippocrates, "let food be thy medicine" – hence my title here.

I was reading a book by John Burnside, the Scottish poet, where he describes how when he was a small boy, an ageing aunt asked that perennial and (for many children) rather boring question about what he wanted to be when he grew up. "I want to be an Italian" he said. Italian men could cook, got excited about things they liked, and



were natural and spontaneous in their affection for children. That's maybe why a lot of us gravitate here – and if you have a drive to heal yourself, here is not a bad place to be. We're all works in progress: if you look at the death notices around here, many people live to their late eighties and nineties. Another old neighbour of mine lived till three weeks after her hundredth birthday, just in time to have a party arranged by the Commune before she left the planet.

As I was finishing this article I came across a book coincidentally called *In Food We Trust* (Mondadori), written by Stefano Paleari with drawings by Riccardo Casiraghi. The book is filled with seasonal gluten free vegan and vegetarian recipes for all tastes and all pockets, for experts and for beginners. Perhaps someone could review it here, for those of us who have found that living in Italy does NOT mean you have to give up the good things, but merely adapt to local ways of being. As the slogan for www.cansurviving.com goes – be free and get back to life!

– by Judith Edwards



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