

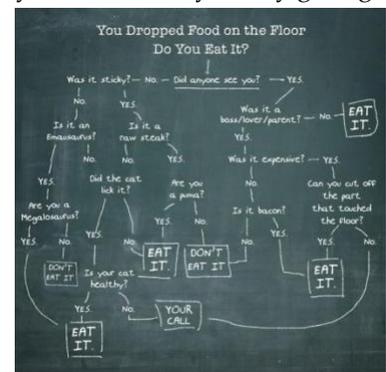
Slow food for a fast world - Winegrower, Vanessa Wong



I am standing in the middle of the kitchen puzzling over what is normally a very simple act: preparing a bagel and cream cheese. It is ordinarily a task that hardly elicits any thought save for perhaps the question of “plain or poppy seed?” But I just had knee surgery for an ACL reconstruction and standing on crutches before the refrigerator with cream cheese I strategize my next maneuver. In a series of pirouettes on my good leg, I spin 180 degrees and move between the microwave and the cutting board to get through the first step of thawing the frozen bagel and slicing it into halves. The next step of getting it to the toaster proves to be a greater challenge for carrying anything in my hands or arms is mostly impossible since my arms are otherwise engaged with the crutches for ambulation. I briefly consider putting the bagel in my sweater pocket. Won’t fit. Or atop my head? No can do. So I resign myself to advancing the bagel like a chess piece along the countertops in between intervals of crutch-stepping my way to the toaster.

In plotting my course, I deliberate whether I should bring the cream cheese with me en route to the toaster or backtrack to the cutting board after the bagel is toasted. Such are the stratagems I ponder over this very simple process. Alas, remembering I am unable to convey no more than the bagel halves I decide that although it required more steps, I would need to bring the bagel back to the cream cheese after the toasting step. This, however, was unpredictably a harder task for I had not foreseen that the toasting made the bagel too hot to handle. Trying not to despair, I gingerly pick up the hot bagel half and resort to flinging it Frisbee style across the kitchen aiming for the cutting board where the cream cheese awaited. The first half lands with success but the second half did something I have difficulty accomplishing with a real Frisbee: a ground bounce, or in this case a countertop bounce and it ricochets off and over the other side of the counter. Sighing I think to myself, “I should have chosen poppy seed—more friction”.

So with twenty extra laborious and limped steps to retrieve the wayward bagel, I manage to spread the cream cheese and now puzzle over how to transport the now ready bagel to the dining table. Plate or no plate—that is the question. I decide to forego the plate since it required more steps to the cabinet and back. I was pleased to find that the bagel halves stuck together agreeably and conveniently with the cream cheese in between so I could hold it through the bagel hole looped between thumb and index finger and still hold onto the crutch with the remaining fingers. That pleasure was short-lived upon discovering that handling a prepared bagel risked getting cream cheese on my hands. Not ordinarily a problem but tragic when cream-cheesy crutch handles need to be vigorously avoided. Very nearly giving up and wiping my hands on my pant leg, I sigh and shuffle my way over to and from the paper towels. With wiped off and clean hands I resume my task and proceed to the dining table when a mere two steps from my destination, I felt the agony of defeat as one bagel half slid from my grasp and onto the floor. “Noooooo!” I cry out at the perverseness of this whole episode of Operation Bagel. Not to be completely vanquished I employ the 5-second rule and pick the bagel off the floor and thank the breakfast gods for not allowing the Murphy’s Law of the buttered side falling face down to happen. Finally arriving to the table with bagel I realize I needed to repeat the whole process but this time for a cup of coffee!



I found that when I eventually was able to sit and partake of my hard earned breakfast I realized it had taken me a full 25 minutes to accomplish something that ordinarily takes just 5 minutes—so many

calculated and painstaking steps for such a simple operation. It made me appreciate each step and all the thought, deliberation and planning that went into each step, however small and seemingly insignificant. Bagel and cream cheese is not normally a slow food but with my temporary disability, I did have to get meditative to appreciate it with this Zen-like perspective.

The Slow Food movement started in the late 1980's as a way to counter people's insidious enslavement to the speed of the "Fast Life": the frenzy we humans mistake for efficiency and productivity. It is the philosophy that we should not only take the time to fully enjoy and appreciate food in our lives but also seek out and support the foods and the producers of these foods that likewise embrace this philosophy in their conscientious and considered farming, and their production and preservation of these foods. There are Slow Food chefs and restaurants that adhere to the "Slow Food manifesto" that strive to preserve local food traditions and stem the tide of dwindling interest in traditional gastronomy that falls out of favor or becomes forgotten for faster or otherwise more efficient fare. There is even an "Ark of Taste", an endangered species list as it were, that designates and catalogs fruits, vegetables, grains, livestock and other foodstuffs like salts, oysters and honey that face a sort of cultural extinction because their cultivation is too laborious or unproductive for a cost efficient, fast-paced world. In the home, "slow foods" are disappearing from our culinary repertoire because folks just don't have the time, inclination, or know-how to prepare them.

I often think about wine as the ultimate Slow Food. Not only does the beverage itself undergo a long process from grapes to glass spending months, even years, to transform starting with harvest and vinification and ending with its aging in barrels and further development in the bottle. Similarly the timeline of grapevine to grapes is an even longer and slower course and progression. The collective stages of this odyssey of the cultivation of plant to produce fruit that undergoes a process to produce food that itself continues to evolve through time can amount to the passage of decades and, conceivably, even a century. And within each of these phases come many steps and decisions that affect the outcome of the wine and the vine in many ways large and small. Often the outcomes of each of these decisions cannot be determined or realized immediately and sometimes takes years to see the effects.

For example, when I consider which type of barrels to use for each wine lot, the trial of a kind of barrel takes me at least three or four years through several vintages to evaluate the barrel itself and even more years when I place that information comparatively in the grand scheme of many vintages and assess the wine's character through the course of years' aging well after it has left the barrel and been put into bottle. The choices made in the vineyard have an even longer impact timeline. Nick and I plan and discuss decisions of the past and future with decades of observation and consideration. Farming estate grapes on our own land allows us to view the progression of the vines and wines produced from them with a very long term view. Even with non-estate grapes the process can be a lengthy one as well. There was one vineyard whose grapes we used for our Sonoma Coast cuveé that we worked with for seven vintages before I ultimately determined it was not quite the right match for our wines.

We live in the fast world that seems to become ever faster. I find that people, myself included, apply the same expectations of speed and the idea of "got to have it now" of certain aspects of day to day life to all things in life. I call this the "Amazon Prime" effect. Why isn't that package here yet? I ordered it a week ago! Why hasn't she answered my email/text? I sent it two hours ago! Fast is wonderful, is it not? Yet, not everything in life can be that fast and not everything should be that fast. Fast is not always beneficial, valuable, nor indicative of what is truly important. The 20 years of our farming and the 30 years of making wine in which we have gained and built up knowledge of our vineyard and further the understanding of the wines it produces, is but a mere blip in the grand timeline of wine-growing in general. Some things take time, some take a long time. Wine is very slow food. To bring it to you is a slow journey and we hope that you will enjoy it in the same spirit of slow food: over a relaxed meal prepared

thoughtfully and with care. Perhaps even a stew that slow braised for hours to become the amazing dish that only time and slow gentle cooking can deliver. However, if you ever truly wanted to experience the contemplative meditation of what making a slow food is really like, try making a bagel and cream cheese on crutches.

Operation Bagel: Mission Accomplished (Slowly)

