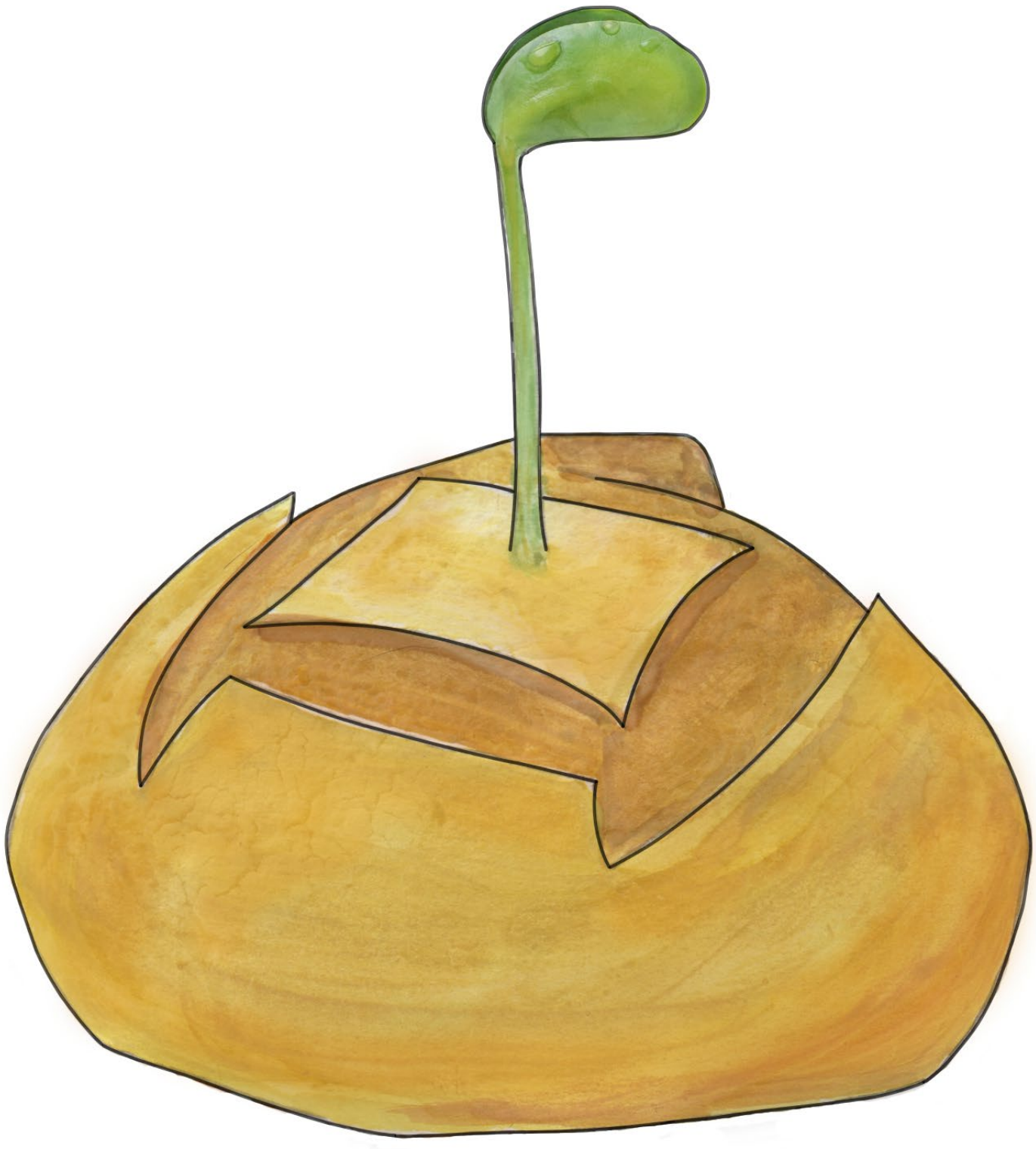
Bread

SPRING 2014



BREAD

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WELCOME

Spring is my favorite season. I love summer, and the colorful leaves of autumn are a sight I could admire for hours, but as the season of beginning and rebirth, spring is special.

All those tiny seeds that were buried into the ground the previous fall now wake up to give birth to new life. Trees that lost their leaves grow new ones. After months of dark nights and short days, the sun shines brightly again! No matter how many times I experience this, it is always magical to see new life sprout where just a few weeks earlier was nothing but gray.

If I was to get all philosophical, I could add how spring is a lot like bread; new life growing out of humble beginnings. But that's maybe a stretch, so I will talk about this magazine instead.

Just like spring (or bread), this first issue of BREAD in 2014 is a new beginning—in many ways the same as what you have come to expect in the past two years, yet new and fresh in others.

What is the same and hopefully as easily recognizable as ever is our passion for bread. The joy of bread. The magazine is, and has always been, all about bread. At the same time, it is also about the people who make bread, and their stories. While that isn't new either, this year we are pushing the stories right to the front row, building the magazine around them in the hopes of inspiring you to bake more, to experiment more, and to enjoy your bread making more.

A lot has already been (and will be) written about the how-to of bread making, so I decided to start this year looking at bread from a more abstract level, thinking about the reasons why we bake, where we are in the craft, and where we want to go rather than how to get there. That said, I am sure that there will still be bread making advice in the magazine, in this issue and those after it, as well—I am still looking for the perfect mix of formulas, tips, and stories.

So, to get this new year started, in this issue, we will look at beginnings, exploring the theme through different points of view:

A master baker's journey to the trade.

The beginnings of bread as grain, flour, salt, and starter.

My trip back to the country that first taught me to love bread.

How people are finding new beginnings through the craft of bread making.

I hope you will enjoy what we have in store for you! I can tell you that making this issue, I had the most fun I've ever had with the magazine so far. And I have a feeling things are only getting more exciting from here on.

So, if you have friends who don't yet know about this magazine, it would be great if you lent a hand and told them about the magazine. This way, we can spread the word and keep the magazine going for years to come.

Finally, I have something new in the works that I have wanted to talk to you about for a long time: I am in the middle of writing a book—or bread manifesto—with the working title *"What I Talk About When I Talk About Bread."* It will be a small e-book about why bread matters and how anyone can get started with making his or her own, based largely on material from the first years of the magazine.

Once the book is finished, I will make it available for free on the magazine web site but also on all major e-book sellers such as Amazon, iBooks, and Kobo. To be notified of the book when it comes out, be sure to join our free mailing list on the magazine's web site. In the next couple of weeks, I will also be sending out more information on the book and how you can be involved in it…

I am excited about this project and can't wait to share and finish it with you!

If you have anything you'd like to comment on, ask, or tell me, I'd love to hear from you. I am always interested in hearing what you want to see in the magazine.

Thank you for reading, and happy baking!

Jarkko


SEMI-EXTENSIBLE
2 Ep

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

by JARKKO LAINE

On the last day of December in 1999, I was nineteen years old.

While the western world was busy worrying about apocalyptic events that would surely take place with the new millennium just behind the corner—from elevators getting stuck all the way to airplanes falling and crashing (all because some computer programmers twenty years earlier thought two digits were enough for presenting years)—I sat next to a fire in a small village somewhere in Senegal. The sky was clear and I could see the stars and the satellites above me. There were no city lights blocking the view. The weather was cool according to West African standards, around 18 to 20 degrees Celsius (64 to 68°F). Everyone gathered around the fire to warm up and to chat and sing together. We felt a kind of connectedness that only comes from being disconnected

It was a simple task, all I had to do was to walk the one block distance from our home to the bread kiosk, hand the seller a coin and bring the bread home. But in my mind, I made it feel as if there was some special, secret knowledge and understanding involved in the process.

from the internet. When we came back to the city and connected again (this was the time before the internet found its way into our pockets), the world was still there.

Fourteen years later, in February 2014, I found myself back in Senegal. This time, with a family of my own—and thanks to my mobile operator, once again without the internet in my pocket. I was eager to show my wife and two children all the places and people around whom I spent my childhood, but also to see if I could still find that one bread kiosk in the small town of Fatick. A kiosk you may remember from the very first article I wrote for the first issue of BREAD, roughly two years ago. The article was titled *"Bread, a Love Story"* and it described my journey to bread, a love story that started as a young boy buying his daily bread in Senegal and still continues to look for its shape and form.

From an early age, it was always my job to buy the bread for the family. And in a way only a first-born child can, I felt an immense pride for this duty. It was a simple task, all I had to do was to walk the one block distance from our home to the bread kiosk, hand the seller a coin and bring the bread home. But in my mind, I made it feel as if there was some special, secret knowledge and understanding involved in the process. I was certain that someone else doing the same job wouldn't get as good a bread as I did. To think of it now, I must have been an annoying kid… Or maybe I didn't say it out loud? I hope I didn't say it out loud!

On a hot day in February, around noon, I am standing at the same street corner, the place where my journey with bread started. The old kiosk is no longer there. In its place, under the same tree that used to give shade to the kiosk, someone has built a tiny shop from bricks—only slightly larger than the kiosk made of corrugated steel that used to occupy its place. The shop is painted light

blue with a hint of turquoise. A woman in a bright blue dress is napping in the shade of the tree. A group of children look at us from a distance, curious to see what we're up to. A peek inside the shop tells me that they still sell bread: there is a pile of baguettes sitting on the left side of the shop's only window.

My son pulls me by the hand, telling me to hurry up. We have strolled from our old house to the kiosk and while the distance is no more than hundred meters, the blazing sun is at its hottest, shooting its rays from straight above our heads, and the boys are already getting all red. Locals have understood what we don't: the early afternoon is no time for a walk—especially when the temperature rises above 40°C (104°F). It's the time when you sit down, take a nap, and save your energy. It's time for siesta, and the streets are quiet. Save for a few slowly moving donkeys and some people who absolutely need to go somewhere, there isn't anyone else walking the streets beside us. So, we move on and return to our air-conditioned car and drive away.

Things change. Bread moves from kiosks to small boutiques. Some roads get a new pavement.

But at the same time, nothing changes. The sun is still hot in Fatick. People there still enjoy their siestas. Sheep, goats and donkeys still walk around the town just like they did when I was a kid walking those same roads every morning.

In Fatick, early into my trip, I hadn't yet reminded myself of the hospitality (teranga, as they call this attitude) of the Senegalese people and how the way they do things differ from the timid ways of Finland, and so, I didn't walk to the shop to ask about that old kiosk and its seller, Birame. My kids were thirsty and wanted to move on, so I just shot a few photos and kept walking. A week later, in Mbour, however, I was already braver.

So, when I noticed a red, slowly fading and rusting kiosk in the same exact location where I used to buy bread when living in that city (it's the kiosk I presented in a mini "documentary", Buying the Bread), I jumped out of the car and walked up to the kiosk.

It was already past noon, but there were still a few baguettes left on the kiosk's shelf. At first, the place looked empty but after standing there for just a minute or so, I noticed a woman, maybe in her mid-thirties or early forties, walk up to the kiosk. She was clearly puzzled, trying to figure out what this white, tourist-looking man was doing in front of the kiosk at that hour of the day. My family pointing at the kiosk with two Nikon digital cameras probably only added to the confusion.

As I explained in my broken but quickly recovering French that I used to live in the house just behind the corner, her smile grew wide and we got into a friendly chatter. I told her that I used to walk up to this kiosk and buy bread from it. She in turn told me that it was her mother—now already an old lady, she said—who used to sell the bread in that


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Riposte
En partenariat avec des Français, le
Président du Conseil rural de
Ndindy, Cheikh Seck, a procédé, ce
mardi, au lancement du projet en
vue de l'implantation de robinets
pour des hameaux de la commu-
nauté rurale de Ndindy. Occasion
pour le député
Président Sall ?
N'est-ce pas
vernementale.

kiosk. And that her mother was still responsible for the kiosk and its business. After a few minutes, we shook hands, I bought a baguette, and we parted ways, each smiling and happy about the encounter.

And the bread? This was the bread I remembered from my early days. Crisp from the outside, smooth, like a ball of cotton from the inside. It's so soft that when you spread butter or some chocolate and peanut spread, *Chocoleca*, on it, the inside gives up and gets pressed between the crust and the filling. If you take some of the crumb in your fingers, you can press it lightly and form a ball.

But was this great bread?

The question didn't leave me alone. It was the bread of my memories, bread that I had grown up with, bread that I had loved. But at the same time, when some of our Senegalese friends, surprised by my curiosity about bread, said the bread in Senegal isn't all that good, I couldn't disagree either. It is white bread, quite subtle in taste. But on the other hand, full of small hints of flavors that each brought up new memories.

Later, when visiting Boulangerie Wazin, the oldest bakery in Mbour, opened in 1974, the bakers made it even harder for me to keep loving the bread. As I asked them about their methods and the ingredients they use, one of them picked a small plastic bag labeled as bread improver and gave it to me. In the list of ingredients it listed things such as soy flour, some E codes, as well as high gluten flour. This was their secret ingredient, and although I had suspected something like this, I was surprised by the way it was presented. I smiled and thanked for the bag, keeping all my negative thoughts to myself.

Again, I bought a bread.

And again, I loved it.

"It's so soft that when you spread butter or some chocolate and peanut spread, Chocoleca, on it, the inside gives up and gets pressed between the crust and the filling. If you take some of the crumb in your fingers, you can press it lightly and form a ball."

The next day, I came back for more bread and to see the bakers at work. They invited us in, told us to be like at home, and so we did. The bakers were in the middle of rolling small baguettes with the help of a machine—although they did say many bakers in Senegal still do this step by hand—and placing them on the trays to rest. With five men doing the work, it went fast and I enjoyed watching their coordinated movements as the pieces of dough moved quickly from the cutting board to the shaping machine and then onto the rack for rest. Then we gathered for group photos. I was given a piece of dough to try in my hands. Everyone was welcoming and friendly, eager to show us what they were doing.

There was a sense of pride for the work. And I loved it.

For the rest of the trip, I kept thinking about the conflict between how I felt the bread could be done in a more artisanal way and how at the same time I still enjoyed it just as much as in my childhood. And after a while, I realized it is only natural to feel two ways about the bread. Whether I love this bread or not has nothing to do with any objective measure of great bread.

The taste is rather bland, and there is virtually no nutrients in the bread, but even though it is almost like factory bread made by hand by a group of bakers, the mouth feel is spectacular. And, as the owner of Boulangerie Wazin told me, white and fluffy is how most people in Senegal want their bread. Give them anything denser, a good loaf of sourdough for example, and they will not buy it.

And still, I loved every bit of it.

I loved how on my first morning in Senegal when I went to buy the bread with my father, I saw young men unloading bread from their old and trusty white van, leaving the baguettes in front of the shop, packed

in used flour bags. How the dark golden crust of the bread placed on the top of the pile bathed in the soft morning light.

I loved how on my first morning in Fatick, my four-year-old son got to buy a bread and how proud he was while carrying it home in the cool morning with the sounds of roosters echoing in the background.

I loved slicing the bread, cutting it into six pieces of equal sizes just like I did as a child. How the baguette was still called just "pain"—bread. And I loved how it was still wrapped in a small piece of paper for the trip back home.

In Dakar, the country's capital, I got to taste some bread from the new, finer bakeries that have arrived in Senegal during my fourteen years away. Among them were even breads leavened with wild yeasts, such as my father's favorite, the delicious seeded sourdough bread called Grand Cru. Some breads wore the name of *Eric Kayser*, the world famous baker from Paris.

But still, when I look back and think of bread in Senegal, what comes to mind is the basic baguette.

The bread from my childhood memories.

Would it be better if bakeries started providing a healthier bread with more whole grain, and maybe even some local flours such as millet? Absolutely. Would it make sense to drop the additives? Certainly.

But even then, the stories, the people, and the memories surrounding this simple white bread kept me enjoying it all.

And that's how, back in the place where my journey with bread first began, I realized more strongly than ever how much the stories we tell ourselves matter.

Of course, looking back, it's easy to see a story, a plot, or a clear path where there really was nothing but a series of random or almost random events. That's how the human mind works, building narratives. But I think that's OK. I like my bread story and how it ties into what I do every day today. Writing about bread, I get to look back, to think about these humble beginnings, and then build on them. And as you can see in all of the articles in this magazine, and especially this issue, bread is a fantastic vehicle for stories.

Eating and buying the same baguette I enjoyed twenty years ago brings back memories. Memories such as the one time we bought fat baguettes straight from a bakery in Mbour, Boulangerie Amadou Bamba, and my mom shred pieces of it to share with all of us children as we were driving home. The bread was still warm, straight from the oven, and tasted delicious even without anything on top of it. We ate all of the first baguette right there.

When I eat a good sourdough loaf, whether it's one I have made myself or bought from one of my favorite bakeries, I often think of the breads I have made and the breads I have eaten.

My mind goes back to the time I bought my second baking book (it was Crust by Richard Bertinet), as a birthday present for myself. My son Oiva was still little and as we sat in a McDonalds restaurant afterwards, he made funny voices, I leafed through the book, and just felt happy about life, bread, and even the McDonalds hamburger.

Saying that "food is more than fuel for the body" might be a cliché by now, but that's because it is true. And bread, at least for me and probably anyone in love with the staff of life, is something deeply emotional. A vehicle for stories, memories, and sharing. This is what this magazine is all about, and why I want to keep baking and writing.

This is why I still appreciate the bakers in that small bakery in Mbour, working the oven, shaping the baguettes, selling the bread. Even if they add a little bread improver in their dough to make it lighter and fluffier.


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THE MAKING OF A BAKER

by JARKKO LAINE

Every baker has a story about his or her journey to the craft of bread making. For one baker, it was an accident; a summer job that stretched into winter and then into years to come. For another, it was a hobby that took over and became a second career. What was once just a question of "what if?" is now a passion. These many stories of what brought people to bread and how they then went from taking their first stumbling steps all the way to mastering the craft never fail to fascinate me.

This is why, when I learned about Lionel Vatinet and had the chance to chat with him, I was thrilled: the master baker had quite the story to share, from his early years at the centuries-old French guild of artisans, *Les Compagnons du Devoir*, to traveling the world, to helping get the San Francisco Baking Institute off the ground, to finally meeting his wife and settling down in Cary, North Carolina where they now run their bakery, La Farm.

Lionel had just published his book, A Passion for Bread, which was the perfect excuse to poke his mind and ask the baker some questions about his adventures as well as his relationship with bread and baking. We spent an engaging hour and half talking over the phone, mostly me asking him questions and then listening to his stories—but he did also manage to surprise me with a few questions about my impressions on his book and my thoughts on bread.

Looking at the bakers at work, he saw that the job wasn't easy, but it did look inspiring, with bakers working in the middle of the night, taking pride in what they were doing. And so he made his decision to become a baker.

FINDING A PASSION

Some thirty years ago, Lionel Vatinet was sixteen years old and trying to figure out what it was he wanted to spend a lifetime doing. He knew he wanted to see the world, and as—in his own words—he "wasn't much of a student", he felt that working with his hands would be the right choice. But what should that work be? Lionel's parents ran a small café in the French town of La Rochelle, with customers representing different trades from plumber to electrician and auto mechanic. To help their son find his calling, they mined this network of customers and arranged for him to spend a few days in their professions, observing and experimenting with different lines of work. But it wasn't until Lionel stepped into a local bakery that he got really interested. While at the other jobs, he grew bored in just a day or two, here, he immediately felt curious to learn more.

Just like any French boy of his age, he already had an appreciation for bread and the profession of a baker, he just had never thought of himself as the baker. Growing up, the scent of bread baking was always present, and bread was eaten at every occasion, from breakfast to dinner. "Bread has always been a part of me," Lionel says. But as he tells in his book, until this time of contemplating career choices, "cooking and baking unquestionably remained my mom's job."

But now, standing in the bakery, he felt immediately at home. When I push him to say what was the thing that first made him realize he had found his passion, Lionel says it was the smell: "I've always been very sensitive to smells. So when you are close by to a bakery and they bake, it was magical."

Looking at the bakers at work, he saw that the job wasn't easy, but it did look inspiring, with bakers working in the middle of the night, taking pride in what they were doing. And so he made his decision to become a baker.

"I knew I had found my calling. I had to learn how to make bread." he writes.

LES COMPAGNONS DU DEVOIR

The next decision was to pick the place where to learn the trade. Lionel's parents had heard of an ancient guild of artisans called *Les Compagnons du Devoir*. No one knows exactly how far the history of Les Compagnons du Devoir goes back, but the legend is intriguing: According to the tale, it all started with three men working together to organize the building of Solomon's temple in the ninth century B.C. These men consisted of King Solomon himself aided by two of the founding characters of the compagnon tradition: Maître Jacques, and Père Soubise. While there are no proofs for this claim, and no remains of even the temple itself have been found, what is clear is that the guild is ancient. The first recorded mentions of Les Compagnons du Devoir date back to the middle ages, around the twelfth century when guildsmen were regarded as the top craftsmen of their time, skilled constructors and traveling artisans who built the great cathedrals of Europe.

No one knows exactly how far the history of Les Compagnons du Devoir goes back, but the legend is intriguing: According to the tale, it all started with three men working together to organize the building of Solomon's temple in the ninth century B.C."

Despite changes in education and the reports of the slow death of the traditional ways of teaching and learning, the guild is still alive today, training young men—and in recent years, women—in a wide ranges of craft, including among others carpenters, plumbers, painters, and since the seventeenth century, as the only food-related craft in the guild, bakers. The training is based on the principle of "the oldest teach to the youngest" and built around hard work and strong moral principles of community and sharing. The goal is not only to help the young trainees become accomplished craftspeople in their chosen fields but also persons of character who will be "positive representatives of the guild", as Lionel writes in A Passion for Bread.

With its focus on travel and apprenticing, "Les Compagnons" caught Lionel's attention: "It was a chance to travel. And this was a big piece for me. You leave your own family, go into a new family, traveling all over France, Europe and so on and so forth." he says.

The guild's philosophy and tradition inform their work already starting at the entrance examination. First, an applicant needs to have a recommendation from someone inside the guild—a distant relative of Lionel's was an upholsterer trained in the guild and agreed to be his sponsor. But that's not enough. In addition to the recommendation, an applicant needs to go through a week of testing during which other Compagnons observe the applicant, judging his character and potential.

So, one day, Lionel's father and grandfather drove the young man from their home in La Rochelle all the way to Bordeaux, a city approximately two hundred kilometers away, where he stayed for a week living in a dorm with other applicants and working at a bakery.

Some simple tests in mathematics and French are needed, "so they don't have to

go back and teach you to read, for example," as Lionel says. But mostly, what the week tests is the applicant's motivation and aptitude for this type of work. At this point, applicants don't yet know anything about bread making, so they help with all kinds of daily tasks from organizing tools to cleaning the bakery, and most importantly, work through the night shift just like they would later as bakers. This tests the young applicant's motivation, but also gives them an idea on what to expect from both the training and the work that follows after it.

"They give you a very simple task, and then you work ten, eleven, twelve, fourteen hours… Do you have the stamina to stay awake working for so long? And you do this four or five days in a row. They put you to test to see if you are pleasant when you are tired. And you live in community, and you need to share, even when you don't know somebody. Are you going to be a social or antisocial?" Lionel says.

"But as importantly, the tests are there to make sure you are going to like what you engage yourself with."

Lionel did and so he worked hard, not wanting to fail. "I did want to prove a lot. For me, but for also for my surrounding family. So it was a 'no-no' for me to fail." he says.

After the week was over, Lionel returned home and waited anxiously for a response.

"You're nervous, a little bit, because you don't want to fail. And you still don't know if you're going to be accepted or not. They give you an answer much later to tell you yes, you're going to be accepted—or not. So you have always this stress going about it."

Eventually, the yes arrived, and Lionel started his apprenticeship. He was assigned to work with a baker in the city of Tours, and so his journey to becoming a baker began.

BEING AN APPRENTICE

No matter which route you take to becoming a baker, the only way to learn the craft is through countless hours of practice. There are no shortcuts. And this is something an apprenticeship, be it in a guild like Les Compagnons du Devoir, or simply working with a baker does better than any other form of training. Working alongside accomplished master bakers, a Compagnon gets to learn from the best while doing the work starting from day one.

The training at the guild is organized in phases: it starts with an apprentice period, followed by the Tour de France—a journey across France working with different bakers, and ends in completing a masterpiece work, a demonstration of having mastered the craft. It is also possible to join the guild for the Tour de France having already completed an apprenticeship on your own.

During the first phase, the apprentice is assigned to work with a guild member to learn the basics of the trade. This time, from one to two years, he or she lives in one of the over 50 houses of Compagnons scattered around France, under the strict but loving care of a mother figure, La Mère. The apprentices living in the house are each practicing their own crafts but gather together for dinner and other shared activities which teaches them the community values of the guild.

While apprenticing to become a baker, an apprentice still needs to pass the same exams and tests as he would studying in a conventional school for bakers. However, there is a big difference in the way the knowledge is passed, as well as the principles of the compagnonhood:

"Les Compagnons is a society inside a society. You need to go through all the academical tests required by the French government, but inside Les Compagnons you have a different level as you grow, and you get responsibility as you show

"No matter which route you take to becoming a baker, the only way to learn the craft is through countless hours of practice. There are no shortcuts. And this is something an apprenticeship does better than any other form of training."

the guild you can work by yourself."

After the first year or two, if the guild decides the apprentice has shown the right kind of attitude and promise and is advancing well in his studies, he can apply for adoption into the guild. In the adoption ceremony, the apprentice becomes what is called an "aspirant" and he is given a new name based on the region of the country he is from. This is where becoming a Compagnon really begins. Lionel received his name, "Île-de-France", which he then proudly carried until the end of the training, when he was accepted to the guild as a full member after completing his Tour de France. During the Tour de France, aspirants travel around France (or these days, the world) living in the houses of Compagnons and working with different professionals in different regions, six months to a year in one location at a time.

"Each region has something different to offer, so it's why also when you travel, you change regions to learn new specialties and to be with somebody who has a different technique. So this is what you're going to see the most, by changing your environment. Each region has a different characteristic of weather, of flour, so you don't have a choice, you're going to learn from them." Lionel says.

"Each region has something different to offer, so it's why also when you travel, you change regions to learn new specialties and to be with somebody who has a different technique."

Apprenticing is hard work with long hours and not very much praise. It develops your skills, but as Lionel found during his training, also your character. He says he loved the guild for many reasons, including the possibility to travel and being part of a community, but mostly about how, through its focus on spirituality, it made him who he is today.

"You know, they don't tell you constantly how good you are. They tell you what you need to work on. This is a big difference. They are not tender either. They are truthful to the individual." Lionel says.

"It's a challenge too, instead of going to dance, they ask you to work eighteen hours a day. When you are sixteen, seventeen or eighteen years old you have a choice to make. And they make it very clear what this choice is going to bring you. It's to continue to tread on your road. And they don't talk about money, you know this is about to come later if you get good at it, that's it."

Working hard to reach the results you are after, and not getting the praise prematurely prepares you for not only a great career as a baker but also force you to grow as a human being:

"You're put to test. They make you question yourself and where you are: What's next for you? How you approach life? Don't be satisfied with what you are now. There's always a goal to reach. And when you reach this one, there's the next one."

Another important part of being a Compagnon is the pledge to give it all away. Lionel stresses that this is something agreed on a honor code, there is nothing signed. "It's not the military," he says. But as an artisan enters the guild and becomes a

"It's always been very verbal, very rich this way. The communication is almost like storytelling." Lionel says. "Storytelling of life, of their life, of how they want them to see us, build up true to life. So this was, for me this beauty, magical beauty."

Compagnon, he or she pledges to devote his life to teaching, sharing, and preserving the art and science of bread baking.

"You don't sign anything. It's only moral, you know, it's not a sect, not military, it's nothing like that. It's just: we came together to teach you, to make you a part of what the guild is about. And you stay if you follow the rules. If you can grow with this type of an outfit, you are there until the end, but if you leave, you can not come back."

So, during the training, be it during the apprenticing or the Tour de France, whenever bakers from guild were in town, they would come and share their knowledge and experience with the aspirants. There were no secrets.

"It's always been very verbal, very rich this way. The communication is almost like storytelling." Lionel says. "Storytelling of life, of their life, of how they want them to see us, build up true to life. So this was, for me this beauty, magical beauty."

One such encounter was with Professor Raymond Calvel, the bread scientist and professor of baking known for reviving French bread making as well as describing the autolyse method of dough development. Although Professor Calvel wasn't a member of the guild, as a supporter, he often arranged to meet with the guild's apprentices. And of course, in addition to learning from the masters, the Compagnon aspirants learn from each other, both their peers and more advanced students. Lionel says he was a part of a "fantasy generation", fortunate to practice along fine bakers such as Eric Kayser—whom he calls his Compagnon godfather—Didier Rosada and Dominique Homo.

"You were surrounded by youngsters. When I started, I was seventeen and it was this whole nucleus of people were between sixteen and eighteen years old. We started together and it was very competitive, but it was a friendly competition. Because

we were helping each other. So all this was magical, at some point. And as you grow, you share. Everybody goes to a different region but you meet in one city and you share your experience, and you know the next year you are going to be in charge of a team from two to twenty kids, whatever. You learn a lot from the people who are working there, side-by-side to teach you and to show new techniques." Lionel says.

This ethic of sharing never left Lionel Vatinet's mind, and since finishing his training he has always included teaching in his work in one way or another.

GREAT BREAD

After completing his Tour de France, to enter the guild as a full member, the aspirant is required to create his final work, the masterpiece, the chef-d'oeuvre, in which he demonstrates that he has understood the key concepts of his trade. In his book, Lionel writes: "Whatever craft, the masterpiece must show that the apprentice has gained full comprehension and mastery of the most difficult aspects of their chosen field."

In the case of bread making, this is fermentation.

Lionel's masterpiece work is his interpretation of what great bread is: a classic, slowly fermented big country sourdough loaf with a touch of whole-wheat flour that he today calls the "La Farm Bread."

Being French, bread has always been a part of Lionel's life, from waking up to his father toasting Pain de Campagne to using a piece of baguette as an utensil to collect all those little remains of soup or sauce left on the place.

"For us, bread is like to us a second hand. We eat bread for any purpose.", Li-

onel says. "You don't use a knife, you push with your bread. You eat bread with everything, at the dinner, and at lunch. We were not so much of a sandwich country of people, in our family, but our bread was always there. From morning to dinner, for sure."

While the most typical bread at the time in Lionel's family was the baguette, one of the breads that made the most lasting impression on him as he was growing up was a big loaf he got to eat on visits to the countryside. The bread is shown on the first pages of his book: a sourdough bread almost the size of the boy holding it.

"It's me, when I was six or seven years old and we visited a family on the countryside. There was this baker making this big country bread. Every time we went there, before returning to Paris, we'd buy this bread because it was different than a baguette. It was real sourdough bread. So, yes, I already had some idea about great bread."

This bread along with the famous "miche" from the Parisian baker *Lionel Poilâne* were both examples that shaped Lionel's ideas on what great bread was, and therefore also what he wanted his masterpiece to be like: good old-fashioned, slow fermented bread France used to be famous for. An artistic interpretation that paid homage to the bread that families used to make and bake in the village community ovens throughout centuries.

As Lionel tells me, it wasn't until the second world war when the Americans brought white bread with them that the French people who had been forced to eat dark bread during the dark times quickly embraced the ideals of "everything white, everything fluffy, everything fast".

"This definitely changed a lot, the perspective, you know, of what's good bread today." Lionel says. "When I left, twenty, almost twenty-five years ago, I think eighty to ninety percent of bakeries were not good. They were making these fluffy, white, un-flavorful,

"While the most typical bread at the time in Lionel's family was the baguette, one of the breads that made the most lasting impression on him as he was growing up was a big loaf he got to eat on visits to the countryside."

dried out, dry, no-fermentation breads."

Since then, slowly, through a lot of work by artisan bakers, including many members of Les Compagnons du Devoir, the traditional ways of making bread have been making their way back into the buying audience's minds and hearts.

"But it's difficult to change people's minds, because people buy with their eyes. They look at volume: it is big, it is good. Not true. This simplistic way of looking at bread misses the essence of grains, the passion of fermentation, the technical artistry of the miller. Great bakers respect fermentation and bring nutritional loaves to their community."

Since 1999, when after years of traveling the world teaching bakers and further improving his knowledge about bread making (in 1999, he was one of the coaches leading the American team of bakers to victory at the *Coupe*

du Monde de la Boulangerie) he teamed up with his wife Missy to open a bakery of their own, Lionel has been spreading the message about great bread to a receptive customer base in Cary, North Carolina.

"It was the next step, a natural step for me. I wasn't going to be a teacher in a classroom for any longer. I did prove what I had to prove teaching in a great program and now I was ready to say yes. we can try!" Lionel says.

"We educated the customers by giving out a lot of samples. We also needed to change the culture of how people shop for bread. It's an every day thing. It's not monthly, something you put in your fridge…" Lionel says.

The work paid off and customers found the bakery, which has now grown to include a café.

"They've been very supportive of whatever we do. They are behind us and we continue to grow with them. Five years ago we opened a café, and this changed the floor plan a little bit, but it compliments the bread so well. We make sandwiches, soups, and salads. When you come to La Farm, you know you can have five minutes of pleasure." Lionel says with pride in his voice.

GIVING BACK

When Lionel and Missy opened La Farm, it was clear to them that teaching was always going to be a part of it. It was something Lionel had always loved to do, but also a part of the pledge to his guild.

"When you do your Tour de France, it is five to ten years, but after that, you still have many more years to live and to give back. It is very important to give back, because all of this has always been on bona fide. People are not paid, they do it on their free will. You go there because you believe, because it has been given to you before. This is how we've been going on for centuries." Lionel says. "Compagnonnage is a life commitment."

"So yes, for years, I have been taking in some young kids, because it's not the Tour de France anymore. It's the World Tour. So this is another option for them to see what we do here and what's different to what they do in France. And there is also the language, the possibility to learn English." Lionel says.

But new Compagnons are not the only ones benefiting from Lionel's passion for sharing his knowledge. He has also consulted for large par-bake programs such as Cottage Lane in New Zealand, Terra Breads in Vancouver, and Harmons Grocery which now has a bread program in all 17 stores throughout Utah. And at La Farm, he holds baking classes for home bakers who want to learn to bake better bread.

"It's amazing. They are so enthusiastic, so thirsty for learning. They want to be good. They put all their heart and soul into it. So for me it's a pleasure. Let me tell you, when your audience wants to learn, I have a lot of fun. This is great." Lionel says and continues to explain that by teaching he is also still learning every day:

"Patrick Joubert has said to teach is to learn twice. It's very true. I've been learning more by teaching than when you go somewhere to learn from somebody. For me, it has been a real joy. I've been amazed."

"But what I like about teaching is that when you observe them, you can see where the difficulty is, and you can help them. To change the position of their hand, or explain what has been misunderstood, to show them a different way. Because it's not just one technique, it's also how you adapt it."

The combination of working at the bakery and teaching home bakers works well for him as it allows him to keep doing the work he loves.

"I like to do this for a class, for a day, for a week, it is great. I can not be a teacher in a school, for example, for year in and year out."

"I've had the opportunity to work with

"I like to be alive, I like to be next to them, you know, really to share their experience by, through touch, because there is something sensual to it. So this is what is important."

some great bakers, teachers, and business people, and watch in awe as others become the best in their field. I like to be alive, I like to be next to them, you know, really to share their experience by, through touch, because there is something sensual to it. So this is what is important."

The new book, A Passion for Bread, published in November 2013 by Little, Brown and Company, is a natural follow-up to the teaching, and so from the beginning, it was clear to Lionel that he wanted to capture the same hands-on experience on its pages, to bring the professional side of baking and centuries old teachings to the home baker. The way to do this was through photos so that a reader could get as close as possible to the experience of practicing next to Lionel in his kitchen or at his outdoor oven.

"The condition for me was for the book to be visual, like I learned from in my youth." Lionel says.

When he got to work and, together with the photographer, started shooting the photos for the book, it quickly became clear that this meant hundreds of photos. After the first recipe, he already had that more than eighty photos and it looked like there was going to be at least seven hundred of them! The editor, Michael Sand wasn't ready for quite that many, but he was supportive. So, when you read the book today, you'll find in it four hundred seventy pictures. The condition of being visual was fulfilled and every part of the bread making process is presented in a series of clear step-by- step photos.

"The second thing is doing things professionally. What I do is professional. What I do as home baker is the same thing: Use a scale. Use a thermometer. Control the temperature. You don't need a fancy oven, but building on a hundred years of experience, I want to give you some consistency with your product." Lionel adds.

"And don't hide anything. It's not about a recipe. It's about the knowledge of you to replicate the recipe. So we share this knowledge on that. We try to be simple, so it's been written down in a way that anybody can read it and understand. And with a picture it doesn't matter if you speak Finnish, French, Chinese, you know, it's all right. You can duplicate that."

But in the end, a book is only a beginning, a tool to get you going. To get to great results, you need to practice— but with tips from a master baker, you get a head start.

"This gets you started, and after that you are on your own. And you can be as creative as you want." Lionel says.

"The second thing is doing things professionally. What I do is professional. What I do as home baker is the same thing: Use a scale. Use a thermometer. Control the temperature. You don't need a fancy oven, but building on a hundred years of experience, I want to give you some consistency with your product."

QUESTIONS FOR A MASTER BAKER

In addition to chatting with Lionel myself, I asked you to send your question (on our mailing list as well as on Facebook) and passed them on to the master baker. Here's what he had to say. Some questions that were very similar to each other were combined into one question, so you might not find your exact wording here, but if you submitted a question, you still should find the answer in this list.

❊ ❊

***QUESTION**: I just received a set of wicker proofing baskets. Is there a lining that I need to use with them or can I use them bare, as is?*

ANSWER: Either way, if you do not use a liner, dust with flour.

❊ ❊

Q: *In how many ways is kneading important to the final loaf of bread?*

A: When you mix by hand you are not powerful enough to change or alter the gluten structure. Develop the feeling in your hands.

Q: *How do you differ the amount of hydration of your bread? Do you always use the same hydration level, or which are the most popular hydrations you use?*

A: All this depends on the absorption of the flour. Two of the most popular are Ciabatta, which is usually 80% and above, and French Bread, between 70% and 75%. We don't make bagels at La Farm, but they are a stiff bread, with a hydration level of 45-50%.

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Q: *How does modern health awareness for whole foods (such as whole grain organic flour) affects, if at all, traditional French breads baking, such as Baguettes. Does tradition win? Or is there a place (and market) for whole-grain flour Baguette? Are people today looking for that kind of shift?*

A: Awareness of people about fiber, we are getting there… People love their white flour and tradition.

❊ ❊

Q: *My Pain au Levain's crust is tooth-breaking, like turtle shell. How do I fix this?*

A: Levain bread makes a crustier, chewier product. If you want a softer crust, add some fat to the dough.

❊ ❊

Q: *It takes me two days to make a loaf of sourdough bread and it is difficult to charge $5 per loaf and yet with less technique and skill I can put together a tart or cake and people have no qualms parting with $15-$20 for it. How do we get the "general public" to appreciate this and elevate bread from its commodity status to a product that requires more time, skill, technique and passion to consistently deliver than a sponge that can be put together in five minutes?*

A: Educate your customers on the process, sample your product, show why it's worth $5 per loaf. "If you want a fresh loaf of bread, when you are sleeping, we are baking."

❊ ❊

Q: *It seems as if the professional bakers make always a success baking with a quality bread. I look at them in envy. But, really, do you always bake a successful bread?*

A: No, we are very critical of our breads. We always try to understand how to make it better. Take nothing for granted, adapt to new flour, training, weather…

❊ ❊

Q: *You have been offering classes for some time now. What would you say your students that are most concerned about? What is the hardest thing to explain to them, to make them understand when it comes to artisan bread?*

A: Expressing feeling, developing how to feel the loaf (kneading, shaping). Each dough is different... This is hard to explain.

❊ ❊

Q: *Are there any bread festivals (like the one in Asheville) that you regularly participate in, or conferences like the Kneading Conference? What is it you get out of participating in these?*

A: Atlanta Food & Wine, Charleston Wine + Food, Euphoria, TerraVita. I love to share knowledge and meet people who are passionate as I am about bread.

❊ ❊

Q: *What would you say are the main differences in American flour as opposed to French (or other places where you have baked)? What is the easiest way to overcome differences in flour absorbency? (This is a topic I'm interested in as the flour here in Australia is a lot less absorbent than US flour. I regularly knock back hydration by 5-10% when using US recipes.)*

A: You need to adapt to the ingredients, understand the feeling, and develop structure profile by adding more or less water. American flour is much stronger and has a higher protein amount than French flour.

❊ ❊

Q: *Is it possible to mix ingredients for an enriched sweet dough and keep in the fridge after the bulk fermentation to use next day? I want to improve the taste and structure of the dough, but my concern is about the yeast overpowering the flavor or affecting the final rise.*

A: We don't cover this in the book, but an enriched sweet dough like a brioche, proof for 45 minutes to an hour, fold and put in the fridge overnight. It'll be fine.

❊ ❊

Q: *In the little store in my little town we can not always get bread flour. However, we can get a package of Vital Wheat Gluten. If I added 2 tablespoons of VWG, would that be enough for a two loaf recipe? Is it really important to use bread flour? I use Robin Hood unbleached all purpose exclusively and have never had any trouble with my bread. However, I am branching out into artisan bread baking and I want to be sure.*

A: Typically, you should use 10-12% protein level in flour. An experienced baker can use all-purpose flour, but it is a bit trickier. However, if it works for you, then go for it!

❊ ❊

Q: *How do you define your bread? I mean the idea behind your bread, your style?*

A: Respect of fermentation...
That's the essence of baking.

❊ ❊

Q: *Recently I have had issues with my Pumpernickel bread. When I bake it in a boule shape it does not cook all the way through. The crumb is awesome for the upper 2/3 of the loaves. However, it is still under baked at the bottom. I do not understand why: it sits directly on a the stones. In a bread pan (rectangular and pullman) it bakes up fine. What am I missing and overlooking?*

A: Hard to tell without seeing it. Only thing that comes to mind is maybe when you are shaping the boule, the loaf is too tight.

❊ ❊

Q: *I've read recipes that call for adding salt when doing the kneading before first rise. And most other recipes call for adding it during the initial mix of flour, water and yeast. What is the difference? Also, which salt to use? Sea salt, kosher, mineral salt or iodized salt. Which salt works best with the yeast?*

A: Doing autolyse, add salt after initial mix. As to what salt to use: Salt is salt. If you use coarse salt, dilute in your water for better incorporation.

❊ ❊

Q: *What is your preferred brand and type of flour commonly available in American supermarkets? I use King Arthur organic bread flour and all purpose flour, but these are not available everywhere! Do you have a preferred national brand?*

A: Always look for unbleached, unbromated flour, not particular to a certain brand. We use NC Carolina Ground.

❊ ❊

Q: *When your great hobby or passion becomes your way of earning a living, isn't it dangerous? For me, it's very scary. Your passion becomes your duty, your everyday obligation, how do you overcome that fact? What makes you to continue being so passionate about bread?*

A: To be able to combine the sharing of the knowledge by teaching others.

❊ ❊

Q: *When baking with locally-grown grains, do you identify unique flavors, when tasting the baked bread?*

A: Yes, you can taste different flavors based on where the grain has been grown.

❊ ❊

Q: *Have you changed your baking process as a result of using locally-grown grains, to showcase certain flavor aspects of the flour?*

A: We adapt to the ingredients. Fermentation and the grain will definitely bring a different aroma. It's hard to explain.

BREAD AND SALT

by RALUCA MICU

"By bread and salt we are united"

– Moroccan proverb

It's the start of a new year, and without even noticing, we tend to think of new beginnings. We make plans, we dream of the future and remember old beginnings and where they've led us. In our history, we see many things that have meant the beginning of beautiful things, or even tragic destinies, but two stand tall in this crowd: bread and salt.

As I am writing these words, there are three breads in my house in different stages of the bread making process. When finished, each will look different, taste different and will delight us in different ways, but all three have started with just three basic ingredients: flour, water and salt.

It seems most of the time, we tend to take bread for granted, but most of all it is the ingredients we take for granted, which is why today, I want to take you on a journey: a journey of bread and salt.

Salt is a chemical compound made of sodium and chloride, which has been extremely important for the human race for thousands of years.

Our love story probably began when humans realized the power of salt in preserving food. It was miraculous what salt could do for us: it removed the dependence on seasonal produce and also allowed us to travel over longer distances while still being able to feed ourselves on salt preserved foods.

Even though salt has been around for centuries, it wasn't always easy to obtain. Our search for it has led, during the course of history, to kingdoms being enriched or impoverished, it has truly shaped the course of our lives. We started building roads to transport salt, such as via Salaria, in the Roman Empire, connecting Rome to the Adriatic Sea. Roman soldiers were paid in salt, hence the word "salary", coming from the Latin "salarium". They say the soldiers who did their job well were "worth their salt."

Salt was, at one point, the economic foundation of the Kingdom of Poland and it was salt, sea salt this time—people at that point considered it superior to rock salt—brought by the Germans, that led to the demise of this Kingdom.

Salzburg, Austria was named by the Germanic word for salt, while in the United Kingdom, the city of Liverpool's wealth, at one point, was coming from the salt mines of nearby towns Nantwich, Northwich, Leftwich and Middlewich—meaning "brine spring". In Africa, salt was sold ounce for ounce with gold, from caravans stretching all along the Sahara desert, whilst the first known city in Europe, Solnitsata, located in present-day Bulgaria, was built around a salt production facility.

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ON SALT AND HEALTH

Salt is like no other substance we eat. It doesn't come from plants, or animals, or microbes. It comes from the oceans, long lost seas and the rocks that erode them. It is an essential nutrient, a chemical compound without which our bodies would not be able to function. Salt is also one of the basic tastes our tongues can detect, along with sweet, sour, bitter and the newly discovered umami.

We seem to be very fond of salt these days, sprinkling it liberally in our pots or constantly consuming salty delights, the likes of peanuts or crisps. I guess there is no wonder why "bland" both means low on salt and tasteless. At the same time, there are many articles out there today that will tell you salt is bad for you. And in some ways, it is: If you consider that some days, when we indulge in our love for salty chips and take-aways, we might pack 40 times the amount of necessary salt, on top of other things like fats, then salt might really become a problem.

Medical scientists have suspected for a while now that high salt intake can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke, but should salt be the only one to take the blame for it? Sure, any type of food consumption in excess can't lead to good things, but can it be that foods high in salt are often high in fats as well and that this combination is actually to blame for some of our medical problems, like the ones described above?

What we are not often told is that low salt diets aren't really proven to lower the chances of high blood pressure and actually in some cases were related to undesirable increases in blood cholesterol levels. It has also been shown that salt deficiency—*hyponatremia*—is a dangerous condition that can manifest itself with headaches, vomiting, muscle cramps, fainting and in some, very rare cases, coma.

Most scientists and doctors agree that it is the total intake of salt that matters. The French eat their highly salted bread with unsalted butter for balance. Richard Bertinet says in his book, Dough, that he would rather give up chips than take salt away from the bread, as salt is more than just a seasoning for bread.

This brings me to the following question: should I bake no salt bread? Maybe, but for now I will stick to my three ingredients proven to give us the tastiest of breads: flour, water and salt. Let's talk about salt in bread, the types of salt we might think of using and what is the entire purpose of using salt when baking bread.

SALT IN OUR BREAD

We have been baking bread for centuries. Larousse Gastronomique mentions that: "Bread-making dates back to at least 9000 BC", while "The invention of leavened bread (around 5000BC) is attributed to the Egyptians". Even though we've been baking bread for such a long time, it seems our ancestors only started using salt in their breads around the 1700s.

Salt is one of our oldest condiments and therefore no one can deny its flavor impairing qualities. But that isn't salt's only effect on the bread dough.

Salt helps tightening the gluten structure. The addition of salt will help create stronger gluten bonds, that will ensure the dough can hold carbon dioxide, therefore enabling that oven spring we all crave for and the lovely open crumb texture. Bread with no salt will be sticky and quite difficult to shape, not to mention it will impact its volume.

Another important role of salt, in bread baking is retarding the activity of yeast. This property is extremely valuable, as it allows bakers to manage the fermentation of bread and eventually its flavor. Still, the use of too much salt can result in slowing down the yeast's activity to the point of losing the loaf's volume. This is why, the baking community largely agrees that the correct use of yeast,

dough temperature and levain are better ways to control fermentation than salt.

There are other reasons why salt is used in bread, as Jeffrey Hamelman mentions in Bread: A Baker's Book of Techniques and Recipes: it indirectly contributes to crust coloring, helps preserve the color and flavor of flour and is sometimes used in a small proportion in a levain culture, to prevent it from over maturing during warm and humid periods.

Bread, similar to most foods, will be considered bland and boring without the addition of salt. However, bread made with too much salt will be impossible to eat. So what is the right amount of salt in a loaf of bread?

Most bakers agree that salt in

"Bread, similar to most foods, will be considered bland and boring without the addition of salt. However, bread made with too much salt will be impossible to eat. So what is the right amount of salt in a loaf of bread?"

bread dough should be around 1.8 to 2% of salt based on flour weight. This is where the baker's percentage comes in handy: basically if your final formula has a total content of flour of 600 grams, than you should use somewhere between 10.8 grams and 12 grams of salt.

When baking a sourdough loaf, the percentage of salt used is usually around 1.8%, while enriched dough (like croissant dough) will contain up to 2.5%, as the high butter content requires more salt to allow a correct balance of flavor.

As always, there are of course exceptions to this rule: for your bread to be considered "real bread" as part of The Real Bread Campaign in the UK, you will have to use no more that 1% of salt (1 gram of salt for each 100 grams of flour used in the making of a loaf), as to comply with the current salt reduction regulations of Food Standards Agency UK.

"When baking a sourdough loaf, the percentage of salt used is usually around 1.8%, while enriched dough (like croissant dough) will contain up to 2.5%, as the high butter content requires more salt to allow a correct balance of flavour."

These days, salt is almost always used in the bread baking process.
Yes there are some people, with medical conditions, that will appreciate unsalted bread, whilst Tuscany is one of the places where salt is rarely used in breads, however people generally think bread is at its best when salt, in specific quantities, is used.

It is believed that around 1830s or 1840s the "salt-raising bread" was invented. The name of this bread is in some ways misleading as we all know salt isn't by any means a rising agent. So why was it called "salt-raising bread" in the first place? Well, as it goes with many historical facts, no one really knows for sure. Some believe that it rises because of salt-tolerant bacteria present in the starter.

Another theory is that women were heating rock salt and using it to keep the starter warm during fermentation. The starter would rise over night, helped by the salt's heat and would be ready to be used in the morning to create salt-rising breads.

WHAT SALT SHOULD I USE?

People have been gathering salt for centuries, either from sea coasts (sea salt) or from inland deposits hundreds of millions of years old (rock salt).

Even though in the beginning we were using salt mainly for preserving and flavoring food, nowadays salt is used in many industrial processes, as well as de-icing our roads in winter. Most of the traditional ways of harvesting salt are long gone, as our consumption has increased and people have had to find faster, more effective ways to obtain large quantities of salt.

Rock salt is mined today by pumping large quantities of water into the deposits and then evaporating the brine in massive vacuum chambers to form solid salt. Some of the sea salt currently available on the market will still be produced by gradual solar evaporation from open-air salt pans, but much of it is produced using rapid vacuum evaporation, similar to rock salt.

KINDS OF SALT

Granulated table salt
This type of salt usually comes in small, regular, cubic crystals, that are denser and usually take longer to dissolve but will dissolve uniformly. Most table salt will contain certain additives (as much as 2% of the total weight), which will prevent the crystals from absorbing water and sticking to each other.

Iodised Salt
Many granulated salts and even some sea salts, are fortified with potassium iodine to help preventing iodide deficiency.

Flake Salt
Instead of coming in compact dense granules, flake salt comes in flat, extended particles. Flake salts are either produced in the old ways, allowing the brine from open-air pans to evaporate or by rolling granulated salts.

One of the most famous varieties of flake salt is Maldon sea salt (pictured), coming from the southeast coast of England. It includes individual hollow-pyramid crystals measuring as much as half an inch!

Because of their shape, the flake salt crystals are easier to measure and add by the pinch, while the same volume of flake salt will weigh less than the same volume of granulated salt.

Kosher Salt
Kosher salt is used in the preparation of meats according to the Jewish dietary laws. It comes in coarse particles and it is not iodized. Cooks tend to prefer using it for its relative purity and ease of dispensing by hand.

Unrefined Sea Salt
This is traditionally farmed salt, minimally processed and tended similarly to agricultural crops. Due to minimal processing, unrefined sea salt may contain minor traces of other minerals, algae, particles of clay and other sediments, which sometimes give the salt a grayish color.

Fleur de Sel (literally "salt flowers")
Fleur de Sel is one of finest and most delicate of salts, a produce of west-central France.

It is formed on the surface of salt pans when the humidity and breezes are right and they are collected at the right time, before they have a chance to fall below the surface. Fleur de Sel forms delicate crystals and doesn't carry the particles of sediment that darken the grey salt, but can carry traces of algae that contribute to its aroma.

Fleur de Sel de Guerande and Fleur de Sel de Camargue (pictured) are two of the most famous varieties of Fleur de Sel.

Flavored and Colored Salts
Sometimes salt is transformed into a carrier of other flavors, or in some cases colors. One can find many types of flavored salts these days, including celery salt, garlic salt or even smoked salt, like the ones found in Wales, Denmark and Korea. There are also bamboo salt that Koreans prize for its health-giving properties, the "black salt" of India, a mixture of minerals with a grey-green color and a sulfurous smell and black and red Hawaiian salts, created by mixing regular salt with finely ground lava, clay or coral.

SO WHICH ONE TO CHOOSE?

I always find it very difficult to choose when I have too many options. However, I think with salt it's not quite so difficult.

I've always used granulated salt for my bread, just because it seems the smaller crystals blend better and there are smaller chances of finding a bigger, unincorporated crystal in my bread. Some bakers prefer to use sea salt, because of its taste, or because it suits their ethos, or even—let's face it—because it sounds fancier and therefore allows them to charge more for a loaf.

Daniel T. DiMuzio in Bread Baking An Artisan's Perspective says: "There is little or no demonstrated benefit to using more expensive salts to affect dough strength, fermentation, or bread flavour". His advice is to always use salts with fine crystals, as they tend to dissolve easily, while large crystals must be dissolved separately, so that no unincorporated crystals remain in the finished dough.

However, if you always dissolve your salt in a small amount of water before adding it to your bread, then by all means, you can use even flake salt, the one that comes in large crystals.

One thing I wouldn't recommend, unless you want your bread a specific, quirky color or taste, is to use one of those gadget-y salts: red, pink or even black. On top of changing the color of your loaf, these salts might also impair a quite distinctive flavor, one that might not be to everyone's taste. But hey, who am I to comment? You like your bread with celery? Then go ahead: celery salt is what you need! Who knows?

You might be on to a winner.

THE TRADITION OF BREAD AND SALT

The story of bread and salt doesn't stop here. There is more to this connection than the simple relationship between the ingredient and the final product. Bread and salt have been part, for ages, of a welcome ceremony in many countries from Central and Eastern Europe.

In most Slavic countries, when respected guests arrive, they are welcomed with a fresh loaf of bread placed on an embroidered towel (known as a "rushnik") and a salt holder is placed in a hole on the top of the loaf. In most countries the tradition of bread and salt is a symbol of hospitality and the two are offered to the distinguished guests by young women, sometimes dressed in national costumes.

In Poland, newlyweds are greeted with bread and salt by their parents upon their return from church, while in Germany bread and salt are given at weddings for a lasting alliance between spouses and also when one moves into a new house to wish them prosperity and fertility. In Finland, Estonia and Latvia, instead of white bread, someone moving into a new house is offered dark rye bread as a symbol of blessing.

Hospitality is a common feature that characterizes Muslims around the world as well. A "gentleman's agreement" in the Arab World today is still spoken of as "bread and salt" between us. The worst kind of betrayal is by someone who has eaten with a family and then deliberately hurts them. Such a person has betrayed a sacred covenant.

Even in modern times bread and salt tradition creeps in, in the most unexpected places, like the beloved novel series by George RR Martin "A Song of Ice and Fire", where the ritual is not just one of welcome, but a bond of trust and honor between host and guest, that neither shall harm the other.

We might sometimes overlook the importance of bread and salt, but they are a part of us and have a much deeper meaning than I could even imagine. Wise men, across centuries, have praised our relationship with bread and I hope we will too, for years to come.

“Let there be work, bread, water and salt for all”

– Nelson Mandela

“You shall find out that salt is the taste of another man’s bread, and how hard is the way up and down another man’s stairs.”

– Dante Alighieri

“I have eaten your bread and salt.
I have drunk your water and wine.
The deaths ye died I have watched beside
And the lives ye led were mine”

– Rudyard Kipling

黒麦道

RAIMUGIDO

The Way of The Rye

THE WAY OF THE RYE

by JARKKO LAINE

The Japanese are famous for the way they embrace a modern lifestyle while still managing to keep their age old traditions alive. Calligraphy, martial arts and *ikebana*—the art of carefully crafted flower arrangements—are all examples of areas in life where everything is done according to centuries old rules and instructions. But nowhere does this approach to tradition present itself more pronouncedly than in *chadō*—the way of the tea.

This art form is a carefully orchestrated celebration of green tea and the ancient ways of preparing and enjoying it in events that can last for hours.

The tradition is a wonderful thing in itself, but what I find even more interesting is how it inspires people who, maybe looking for a meditative experience in the midst of a busy lifestyle, get together in "circles" to learn the craft in a process that can take an entire lifetime.

What if we approached bread making in a similar fashion, as a bread ceremony rather than a household chore or a task outsourced to a professional? What if we walked the way of bread just like the practitioners of the tea ceremony walk the way of tea?

Answering this question lead home baker and entrepreneur Jukka Kotkanen to what he calls Raimugido, the way of the rye.

Jukka Kotkanen is a powerhouse of creative and entrepreneurial projects: In addition to running his one man management coaching company Ba Advisors Oy, he is a founding member of Taittuu ry, a non-profit exploring the possibilities of drama in rehabilitating prisoners, he participates in Ell-i, a project aiming to "build an internet for your things", and—on top of all of this—he still finds time to bake traditional Finnish rye bread and produce a rye sourdough starter he calls Raimugido.

Jukka's journey with bread began at the age of fifteen, when he asked his mother to teach him how to make bread.

"Start with half a liter of water, or any liquid really, and then just add the right amount of flour." she told him.

"How much is enough?" Jukka asked, never to get an accurate response.

"Maybe a liter, half a liter… You'll know when it's right."

This approach, shared by pretty much every mother in Finland these days, worked all right for the next twenty years. At times, Jukka baked more, at other times less, but it wasn't until 2007 when the bread baking bug really bit the man. Books, first one by Jan Hedh and then Tartine Bread by Chad Robertson, got him excited about the possibilities of baking serious bread at home, and then, by his spouse's request, he decided to give rye bread a try.

Rye has been grown and used in Finland since 500 B.C. and still two or three generations ago, everyone in Finland knew someone who baked the grain into bread.

In Western Finland, this was the village baker who baked round flat rye breads in big quantities, just two or three

Whenever he gives some of his home made 100% rye bread to older people who still have a memory of the breads their mothers used to make, they do remember. With misty eyes, they tell him that this is what bread really should taste like.

times a year. The bread was baked with a hole in the middle to allow it to be dried by hanging it just below the kitchen ceiling until it was time for another bake.

In the Eastern tradition, on the other hand, every house baked their round rye breads (the type of bread Jukka makes, pictured in this article) weekly, heating the house with the wood fired oven at the same time. Each housewife had her own rye starter which she stored dried to the walls of her wooden dough container. When it was time to bake bread, she added water and flour, and soon the sourdough culture was alive again.

In Jukka's kitchen, you will find such a dough container sitting on top of the refrigerator ready to be used for making some bread.

"I never wash it", Jukka says, and explains how the dough quickly dries and then lasts very well. Loosely covered, the starter also stays safe from dust.

Finland was urbanized at a very fast pace: in the time of just one generation, from 1950 to 1970, the country went from the majority living in the countryside to the majority living in cities. In the big and in many ways important move, many fine wood-fired ovens and rye sourdough starters got left behind. Busy city-dwellers working in factories and later in offices didn't have the time to bake rye bread. And I suppose many were also amazed by the possibility of buying bread instead of spending time and effort on making it at home. That, and eating white bread, soft as a cake whenever they felt like it. The knowledge faded away. And most people never looked back.

But as Jukka tells me, whenever he gives some of his home made 100% rye bread to older people who still have a memory of the breads their mothers used to make, they do remember.

With misty eyes, they tell him that this is what bread really should taste like.

So, with the tradition fading rapidly together with the grandmothers who still have the knowledge passing away, the question becomes: "How can we create something self-sustaining and appreciated, such as the way of the tea, that would not only keep the tradition from being lost but also give it a new birth by making it exciting again?"

To find the answer, Jukka went back to the beginning of bread making: the starter.

A real Finnish rye bread always begins with the starter, the mother of the dough being made. This starter is a sourdough culture which can be years, decades or even centuries old, passed down from one generation to the next, or it can be brand new (starting one from scratch takes about a week). While the difference is mostly emotional, we shouldn't discard it too quickly either; nurturing something for years and then passing it on to a child to carry on stirs something deep inside us. It creates a feeling of continuity, linking the past into present and rooting the baker to something stable he is building his work on top of.

I like the fact that Jukka's rye starter has a story.

While I have always created my own starters from scratch, using flour and water, Jukka received his starter as a gift. The starter comes from Kunnarin tila, a farm

where the mother of the family had been running a small bakery on the side, baking bread in small scale for a long time.

Now she was retiring and the children who were taking over the farm, didn't feel like continuing the bakery. The starter had done its job, and Jukka found it right on time so that instead of simply flushing it down the sink, they gave the starter to him to revive and bake bread with. It had ben neglected for a while and Jukka had to do some tricks (involving pickles) to revive it before it was ready for bread making. A few refreshes later, the starter was bubbling along nicely and the journey had begun.

I visited Jukka in his kitchen in January and while we chatted about bread, the way of the rye, and our experiences with starters and flours, a loaf of his signature rye bread baked in the oven. For the first half of the bake, he kept the bread covered by a stainless steel bowl to trap steam. When he removed the bowl, an intoxicating smell of baking rye bread—probably the best I have ever smelled—filled the kitchen.

This was delicious bread, made according to the best of Finnish tradition.

After reviving the starter and baking bread with it, Jukka realized he now had the tools to start a movement and to to revive the way rye breads have been made in Finland throughout centuries. Drawing inspiration from Japan and the coutry's methods of protecting traditions, he turned his now lively starter into a product and, even more importantly, a tool for bringing the tradition to a new generation and to new countries around the world, maybe not so surprisingly starting from Japan.

With the product still in its infancy (Jukka makes and packages every batch by hand in his kitchen downtown Helsinki), the future is open, but it's hard to miss the determination in Jukka's eyes when he talks about exploring the Japanese way of preserving tradition in more detail and taking his product to the hands of those most interested in, be it in the form of a product line, a book, or pretty much any form that supportsthe long term mission.

The way of the rye began hundreds of years ago, and with the help of products such as Raimugido, we have hope that still many more people will find it and keep walking it for years to come.

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For more information about Raimugido, and a set of instructions on making Finnish 100% rye bread, you can visit Jukka's Pinterest board and Facebook page.

As this issue of Bread is all about beginnings, one of the questions I asked myself while putting it together was: *What is the beginning of bread?*

We could say it's the starter.

As Michael Pollan writes in Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation, quoting Bruce German, food scientist at UC Davis, "You could not survive on wheat flour […] but you can survive on bread." The work bacteria and yeasts do in fermentation isn't all that far from miracle. Still, starter without flour is not food. And there is no starter without flour! If the starter brings life to bread, the ingredients—flour, water, salt—are the building blocks.

So we need flour. And what is the beginning of flour? It is the grain, a wonderful package of nutrition which is both the ingredient for flour and the seed for even more grains.

Save for some wild ancestors of the grains we use today, grains don't grow by themselves but as a result from hard work by farmers who tend the land. To better understand what is involved in the first step in the journey of bread making—that is picking, collecting and sowing the seeds—I sent out a small set of questions to three farmers from the Maine area in the United States.

Despite the fact that we are now at the beginning of what is some of the busiest times in a farmer's year, they all replied promptly, giving us a bit more info on finding and picking the seeds as well as storing and sowing them.

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THE SEED

by JARKKO LAINE

TATE MCPHERSON

1. *Can you tell a bit about yourself and your farm?*

I live in northern Maine right near the Canadian border where we grow about 4000 acres of grains. Crops include wheat, oats soybeans, barley, canola and rye.

Our farm is actually a collaboration of three entities which are all owned by separate owners. But we are all family and each unit supports the other, from seeds to marketing efforts we work as a team for the benefit of our group.

2. *How do you pick the seeds to grow? Do you store seeds from the previous year's harvest or are seeds bought from somewhere?*

The seeds we grow are selected via the University systems mainly from western breeding facilities.

We bring in small quantities and grow for several years (2 or 3) for evaluation before taking them to scale. Once a particular seed has proven itself, we then take it to scale seed production and release to other farms, along with planting on ours. Currently, if you include all crops, we have about 16 different varieties we grow.

While we are working on the yield side of the business we also work very closely with our processor clients who process our grains to make sure varieties we choose will work well in their systems. If they have particular needs, we try to address this and very often move to a very custom grown product for their operation. We serve flour mills, distillers, malt houses, feed mills and many things in between and each sector carries different specs and requirements.

Our varieties have been chosen by a matrix of quality and yield standards which make our farm profitable and work well with our processing clients. This list changes every year and is constantly being updated with the improvement to varieties.

The major influencing factors when choosing varieties is quality for our mills and average three year yields in our region. These are the two biggest factors, along with about 50 others, like disease resistance, harvest timing, fertility requirements and such.

"We bring in small quantities and grow for several years (2 or 3) for evaluation before taking them to scale. Once a particular seed has proven itself, we then take it to scale seed production and release to other farms, along with planting on ours."

3. *How are the seeds stored before sowing? Also, do they require any preparation before putting in the ground?*

Our storages are all forced air tanks systems which allow us to store year around for our clients and maintain quality during seasonal shifts in weather patterns.

Before our seed goes to field it is cleaned, treated with a seed treatment to help prevent disease, and conditioned for planting.

4. *When do you sow the seeds? How does this happen?*

Most of our grains are sown in the month of May, we do have a small amount of grain which is sown in the fall. But this

is less common in our region.

When you say how... We use a great plains grain drill. Ours is 40 ft wide and seeds are planted with this piece of equipment. We very often use a starter fertilizer which can range from chicken manure or compost to commercial synthetics depending which market we are servicing.

5. *What kind of care do the crops require at first as they start to grow?*

Care of the crops is very dependent upon the weather, it can be as simple as tine weeding in an organic scenario, or applying a herbicide in conventional systems...

We do usually use fungicides for head blights and such during the season. Our conventional acreage gets a synthetic and an organic fungicide application, our natural and organic acreage gets only organic approved fungicides—mostly copper or sulfur based products.

We do keep a close eye on soil health, total rain fall, pH, and many other factors in our systems.

MATT WILLIAMS

1. *Can you tell a bit about yourself and your farm?*

We are a farm and a flour mill in Maine that mills only Maine grown and certified organic grains. These include oats, hard red winter wheat, hard red spring wheat, winter spelt, and rye.

We are a small family farm where my daughter is taking over the business. We have grown organic grains since 1997 and milled organic flour since 2002.

2. *How do you pick the seeds to grow? Do you store seeds from the previous year's harvest or are seeds bought from somewhere?*

I picked all of our seeds based on bread making traits and flavor, where the wheats are all self-bakers (not needing other varieties to be blended with them). They are all older varieties sic 1960s early 1970s. and are likely to develop falling number in the low to mid 300 (we require them to be at 250 or above to be processed).

We basically grow our own seed and they are not available from commercial seed companies these days.

3. *How are the seeds stored before sowing? Also, do they require any preparation before putting in the ground?*

Seeds are stored in grain tanks, we pull them from our regular inventory. Since we are organic growers, we use no seed treatments at all.

4. *When do you sow the seeds? How does this happen?*

Winter cereals are planted in late August and early September, spring cereals are planted in our region from late April to late May.

5. *What kind of care do the crops require at first as they start to grow?*

We cultivate for weeds on the spring cereals under-seed with clover and other cover crops at the tillering stage of the cereal. Everything else must be done well in advance of planting.

JAKE DYER

1. *Can you tell a bit about yourself and your farm?*

In 2008, my father in law, Andrew Qualey, my wife Hannah, and I began growing organic grains as Andrew J. Qualey. The farm is located in Benedicta, Maine and has been in the Qualey and Brown families since the mid 1800's.

Potatoes were the primary crop grown on the farm from its beginning until 2005 when Andrew retired from the potato industry. After harvesting the last potato crop in the fall of 2005 the fields were planted to a clover and grass cover and sat idle until we planted our first 34 acre organic spring barley crop in 2008.

Since 2008, we have expanded and are farming 85 acres. We have grown winter wheat and spelt for human flour markets, oats for human consumption, tofu grade soybeans, malting barley, winter rye for flour and malting, and a variety of cover crops.

Our farming operation is a part time job for all of us. My wife Hannah is a registered nurse, Andrew works in the trucking business, and I am the farm superintendent for the University of Maine forage crop and large animal farm, the J.F. Witter Teaching and Research Center.

2. *How do you pick the seeds to grow? Do you store seeds from the previous year's harvest or are seeds bought from somewhere?*

Sourcing high quality seed is of utmost importance. If we are saving our own seed, we scout our fields to see how specific varieties perform and to look for signs of disease.

If we determine it is acceptable for use the next season, we store it at safe moisture levels and clean, size, and germination test it.

We prefer to purchase certified seed when possible when sourcing it from off farm sources. If certified seed is not available in the varieties we are looking for, we make sure to purchase quality seed from reputable growers. High quality disease free seed is well worth the expense as we have limited or no means of controlling seed borne diseases using fungicides. Sub-par seed may be cheaper but costs more in the end due to poor performance from foreign material, broken seed pieces, low germination rate, etc.

We work with our markets to determine what specific varieties, if any, they are looking to source. We research varieties of each crop and try to select the most suitable match for our growing season and soils, what disease/insect/weed pressures we may face, how they will fit into our crop rotation, and yield potential.

3. *How are the seeds stored before sowing? Also, do they require any preparation before putting in the ground?*

Seed produced on farm is stored under cover in grain tanks or tote bags prior to planting. We clean our seed and size it so only the larger seeds are planted.

Seed purchased from other sources is picked up or delivered just prior to planting as to simplify storage logistics on our farm. We do germination tests and if possible calculate seeds per pound and use those results to determine planting rate.

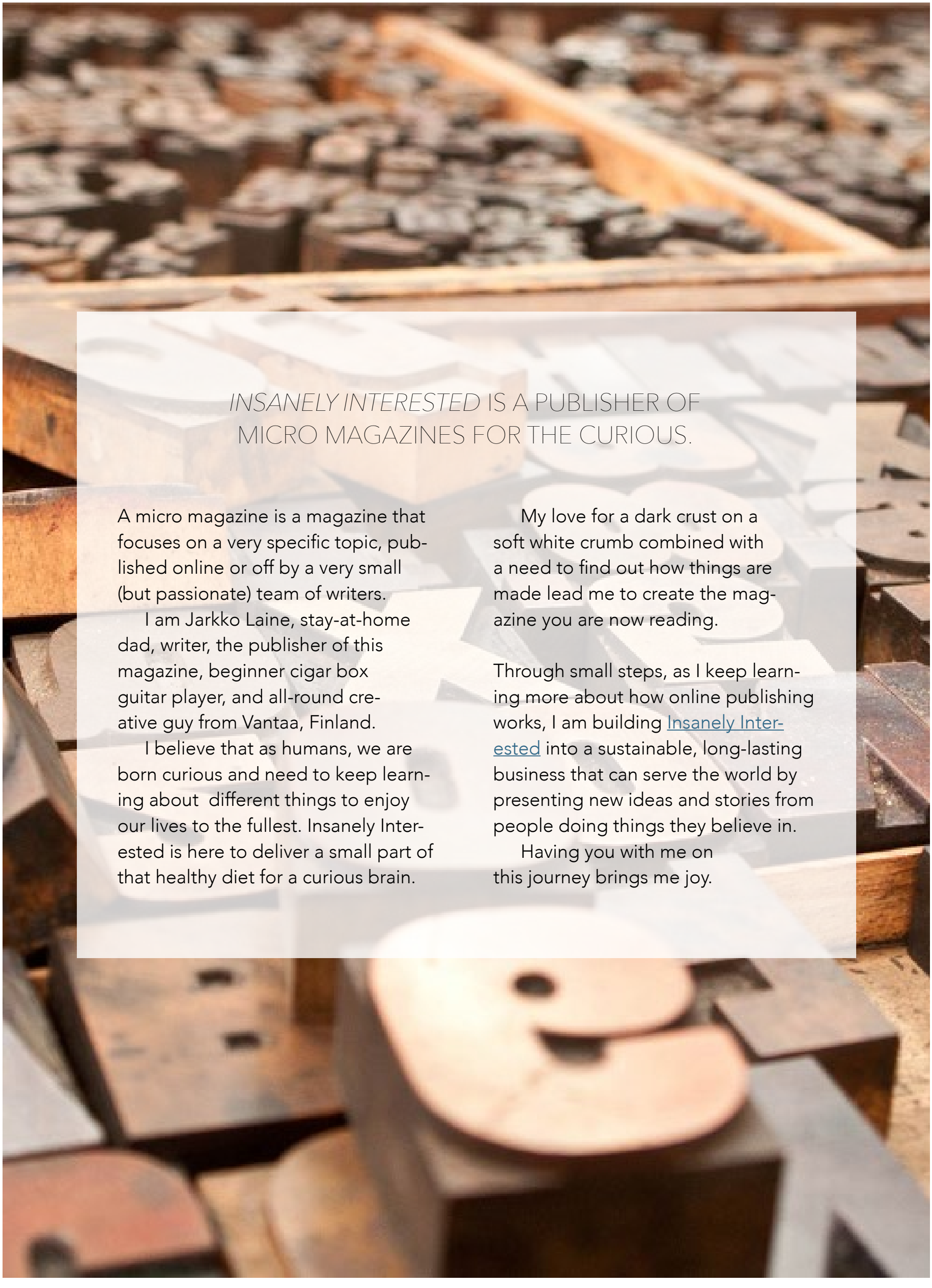
4. *When do you sow the seeds? How does this happen?*

We plant grains and cover crops in both spring and fall. Summer annuals such as soybeans are planted in the late spring/early summer when soil temperatures warm up and initial weed flushes can be controlled by tillage.

All crops are planted with a 24 row grain drill at 6 inch spacing. Underseeding and broadcasting is done by utilizing the grass/clover boxes on the grain drill.

5. *What kind of care do the crops require at first as they start to grow?*

Like all crops, grains are most vulnerable as seedlings. We use soil tests to determine the rates of liming agent and manure fertilizer to apply. We fertilize pre-plant and incorporate into the soil immediately. We make every effort to start the crop off with a well prepared seedbed that has a fine texture and low weed density. Seed to soil contact is maximized by using press wheels on the drill and a roller behind it. If weather and soil conditions permit, we do pre emergence blind cultivations using a rotary hoe and post emergent cultivations.



INSANELY INTERESTED IS A PUBLISHER OF MICRO MAGAZINES FOR THE CURIOUS.

A micro magazine is a magazine that focuses on a very specific topic, published online or off by a very small (but passionate) team of writers.

I am Jarkko Laine, stay-at-home dad, writer, the publisher of this magazine, beginner cigar box guitar player, and all-round creative guy from Vantaa, Finland.

I believe that as humans, we are born curious and need to keep learning about different things to enjoy our lives to the fullest. Insanely Interested is here to deliver a small part of that healthy diet for a curious brain.

My love for a dark crust on a soft white crumb combined with a need to find out how things are made lead me to create the magazine you are now reading.

Through small steps, as I keep learning more about how online publishing works, I am building Insanely Interested into a sustainable, long-lasting business that can serve the world by presenting new ideas and stories from people doing things they believe in.

Having you with me on this journey brings me joy.


Made in an environment
where nuts are used.
Baguettes
£ 1.70
Mini
£ 1.00
100%
£ 4
Volk
£ 6
Counte
Soure
S £

"All sorrows are less with bread."

– Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra

MORE THAN BREAD

by RALUCA MICU

We speak a lot about our passion for bread baking, about flour, water, yeast and salt. We obsess about the perfect loaf and the best oven spring. We get excited when our bread has a perfectly baked crust and an amazing ear. And there is nothing wrong with that: we simply love it!

I often get so hung up in all of the above that I tend to forget that bread can be so much more! That bread has the power to heal, to get people together and ultimately to bring at least a glimpse of hope and happiness to many of us.

Luckily there are people who do think about all of this more than I do. All over the world bakeries have started to be more than just bakeries. They are places where people can get a second chance, a new beginning!

The San Patrignano bakery, hidden in the green hills of Italy's Emilia-Romagna region, was created to give new hope and confidence to drug users in the form of baking skills, taught in a safe and friendly environment. In Scotland, inspired by the San Patrignano bakery, a young man named Matt Fountain, is currently working hard to open Freedom Bakery, a bakery that will offer support to ex-offenders in the hope to provide them with enough skills to allow them to find a job and stay out of trouble, reducing the rate of re-offending.

In the United States, Andrew Stoloff, a successful restaurateur has bought Rubicon Bakery, a financially unstable bakery that used to offer support to drug addicts and ex-offenders and has transformed it into a successful business, whilst keeping true to its mission of helping rehabilitate people.

Like everywhere else in the world, bread baking is on the rise in London, UK, and just like everywhere else in the world, there are lots of people in London who need support.

This is the story of Better Health Bakery, one of these hugely inspiring bakeries that exist not only to bake bread for a profit, but mostly to help people while doing so.

The Better Health Bakery is located in Hackney, London and is run by a local charity called Centre for Better Health. The Centre has offered support to people recovering from mental illness for more than fifty years, providing affordable counseling services and community workshops for different skills like arts, pottery, yoga, and now bread baking.

I visited the bakery on a grey, rainy Wednesday morning. I was soaked and cold and happy to enter this nice, white and quite homey space. Once in a while a customer came in for bread or coffee and was met with a hello and a warm smile.

Joanna, the bakery's project manager, invited me in, gave me a tour of the bakery and told me the story of how it all began.

Joanna: The charity is over fifty years old and used to rely on a historical enterprise called Better Health Products. The enterprise produced different objects for the medical industry, such as casting bags, whilst providing sheltered employment opportunities for the charity members.

It was in 2012 that the director, Ashwin Mathews, came up with this vision of this new enterprise. He wanted to create a workplace that would be labour intensive and that people in Hackney genuinely needed whilst

supporting recovery and promoting well-being in the community. An artisan bakery was immediately resonant with this vision.

In recent years, hand made artisan bread has become popular and appreciated, in London and especially in this area. So, the charity's director, inspired by a number of bakeries in Scotland that support people with mental illnesses or addictions, and by the success of a commercial bakery from east London, the E5 Bakehouse, decided to create this realistic situation where people recovering from mental health illnesses can find themselves in a professional environment, can be trained on the job within a time band of three months, and can get both soft skills and technical baking skills that will get them closer to employment, be it in catering, in baking, anything that requires the kind of skills they develop while being here.

***Raluca**: Tell me a bit about the bakery.*

Joanna: The bakery runs seven days a week and we supply bread to twenty wholesale customers, six days a week. The shop here is open Tuesday to Saturday. The shop has been established in May 2013, so it's pretty new and it has been gradually growing.

We have a lot of students coming in and the area is growing and developing into a great hub of restaurants, shops and small producers. We are open 8 a.m to 4 p.m. and we already have regular customers coming in ev-

ery morning for their bread and morning pastries. The bakery sells also at the local Farmers Market alongside other organic producers, so the week is pretty busy!

***Raluca**: How do people find out about your training program?*

Joanna: When we first started, all of our trainees were already members of the charity. At the moment we are at the point where people are self-referring or are referred by care institutions like psychiatric wards, care homes, by occupational therapy services, places where people already have some support, who have heard about us and our program.

There are a lot of people who support the project because they know it's realistic and that we give quite a lot of attention to how we can support learning, how we can support different styles of learning and we appreciate people can be sensitive about making first steps towards employment.

"They need to want this opportunity, whatever their reason: to get into a routine, stability, to develop soft skills, to get specific job skills, or to build up motivation and confidence to work with others."

***Raluca**: How does the training program work?*

Joanna: We usually have ten trainees at a time, each of them for a three months training period. Most of them are referred by other services, but we take them on board only if they are motivated to do this work, to go through the process and to learn. They need to want this opportunity, whatever their reason: to get into a routine, stability, to develop soft skills, to get specific job skills, or to build up motivation and confidence to work with others.

During the training period we have regular checks to ensure that people are enjoying it, that we deliver good training and that they are getting what they need from their time here with us. We try to understand if they have any issues, or if they need any specific support that we can offer. At the end of the three months placement they get a certificate and we also write them a recommendation letter to help with new training opportunities, or even to get a paid job.

This is why we now have a couple of partner organizations here in Hackney, like the Waterhouse Restaurant on Regent's Canal and L'eau à la Bouche Deli in Broadway Market, who have offered some of our trainees a place to work or extended training periods.

***Raluca**: I understand that you get a lot of support from volunteers?*

Joanna: We have a volunteer baker, but all of our volunteers are both supporting the bakery and the trainees. They have a chance to build skills that are more relevant to baking but they don't need to have baking skills—the primary goal is that they support the training process.

We have seen some of the volunteers going to do internships at the E5

Bakehouse, and some are thinking about opening their own micro-bakeries.

They are an amazing help for us and they are all very reliable. We had an amazing commitment from the volunteers and they are an essential part of the team every day. The trainees get used to them and rely on their support.

***Raluca**: What are the plans going forward, for Better Health Bakery?*

Joanna: Ideally, we hope to grow in such a way that we will become self-sustainable. We would like to be independent of all funding and to generate enough revenue so that we can support the Centre for Better Health charity and to potentially offer paid placements to our trainees.

"We would like to be independent of all funding and to generate enough revenue so that we can support the Centre for Better Health charity and to potentially offer paid placements to our trainees."

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Joanna has been working at Better Health Bakery for just three months, but I can tell she really enjoys what she is doing and that her input, as a day to day team member, is very valuable.

It was 10 o'clock and as the trainees and volunteers arrived, I must admit I was quite nervous. I was there to talk to them and to understand what bread baking and this bakery means to them, but I didn't want to interrupt their daily routine or make them feel uncomfortable in any way. After all, this is the place where they come to learn new things and ultimately to try and feel better and I had no intention of ruining that.

So I stood around watching them go through their morning meeting, discussing the tasks each had to perform and working as a team. There was something very relaxing in the way they worked: calmly weighing the ingredients, mixing the dough, helping each other with instruc-

tions or asking for advice from Yann, the head baker on the shift that day.

I was very curious to know how he feels about working in a bakery where most of the time people have no baking training and yet customers are expecting good quality bread and consistency day after day.

***Raluca**: How long have you been a baker?*

Yann: I went back to France in 2010 to train as a pastry chef and the training had also a part about baking bread.

When I came back I worked for a while as a pastry chef in London, but then I got very interested in the bread baking side, so I started volunteering here a year ago and when a job opened, I took it and that's how I got into bread.

***Raluca**: Do you find it difficult to run a bakery working with people who don't have baking experience? Is it difficult to get consistency right when you have a different team in the bakery every day?*

Yann: It is, especially at times when you have a very good trainee who is leaving and is replaced by someone completely new, who has never baked bread before. It's also difficult because people tend to be very different in terms of their approach. For example, some people don't like the contact with the dough, so they have to wash their hands all the time, which means we waste a lot of time.

We get very different people every time. Sometimes we get people who can't deal with numbers, so when it comes to weighing the ingredients it takes a really long time, but we have to let them do it. On the other hand, sometimes we get people with mild issues, which means they

can do everything with very little supervision, very little direction.

In any case when it comes to 5 o'clock, you are quite tired.

***Raluca**: I assume your wholesale customers expect you to deliver consistent bread everyday, irrespective of the fact that you are not working with a team of professional bakers?*

Yann: Yes, but they do get it. I mean the bread that comes out every day is of good quality and consistency. There is of course room for improvement, but we get very good bread, I think.

We aren't here to make perfect bread, you can go to Tesco's for that. It is hand made bread, it's alive and it depends on so many factors: the acidity of the levain, the temperature of the flour, the room, the water; it depends on the way it's been mixed, folded, shaped, on the people who worked hard to make it, so you can't really have the exact same bread every single day.

***Raluca**: What do you think is the hardest part working here?*

Yann: There are so many things that can go wrong. I think the bread is quite forgiving, at the end of the day we manage to do it and we never had to throw away the dough.

What I find most challenging is working with trainees that don't have any baking background or baking skills. I have all this knowledge about bread and I sometimes assume they know as well, so I have to remind myself all the time that

they don't, and that they are here to learn.

A good thing is that every day we have a different trainee or two and they don't start at the same time, so they try to help each other. That's what we try to achieve at the end, to have the more experienced ones helping the new ones. But at the same time, because of where each of them are in their training, I have to remember to always go back to the basics with them and start from scratch. Sometimes it is difficult for me — you know, you feel like: "Ah, I don't want to have to repeat it today!", but that's why I am here and even though it's challenging we keep going: "This is flour, this is water…".

The difficulty also comes from the fact that people have different problems. Most of them don't come here to learn how to be a baker, they come for other skills as well. Some of them come just to learn how to be more organized, how to work in a team, to learn how to read a recipe and to get more confidence being around people, or ultimately to do other things and take their mind of their problems.

There are other things that they can learn like health and safety, food hygiene, and what is good is that at the end, we can support a trainee to continue in catering and hopefully soon we will be able to offer them a paid bake shift.

***Raluca**: How would you describe a brilliant day here?*

Yann: Just the fact that I have finished the day and everything went fine is brilliant. Also most of the time when we have trainees here you can tell if they have learned something, if they got something good out of that day. For example: we have some trainees that find it difficult to shape and all of the sudden they get it right and you are just happy that they got something out of being here, something helpful out of the training.

I also feel a sense of accomplishment when some of the trainees get into other training programs, or get jobs because of what they have learned here. We have a couple who are starting to work for the Waterhouse Restaurant, so they continue in the catering industry and we hope that I at some point we will be able to hire some of the trainees to stay on and help deliver the training to new trainees coming in.

Sometimes the highlight is that nothing major happened, because so many things can go wrong. For example, someone not weighing the flour or the water correctly and you look at the dough and it's soup-y. You try to save it, but you know that when it's wrong, it's just wrong, there are no two ways about it. Though the bread, as I said, is quite forgiving, the process of making it isn't really. So, sometimes you're happy just to know you don't have to cancel any order, that your customers will get their bread and that it is good quality bread.

There aren't many wow moments really, but a day for me is good when our trainees get something out of it and enjoy it.

***Raluca**: Do you do regular morning bake shifts?*

Yann: No, not anymore, but I will take back one bake shift a week because I miss it! I like waking up in the morning, cycling through London when there is no one on the street and it's not that cold. It allows you to spend some time on your own. You know, the phone won't ring and you won't have any customers coming in and you can just concentrate on your thing.

That's a good part of the day.

***Raluca**: What are the plans for the future when it comes to baking?*

Yann: At the moment we are mostly focusing

on bread for the trainees, but we are planning to do more pastry as well, so we can give them more things to do. They already learn different skills like working with the till, making coffee, serving customers, but I am hoping to start teaching them how to roll the dough, so they can help out with the pastry side of things as well.

The range of things that are possible here is pretty wide, but for now we concentrate on the program to get it completely right, so we are working on the processes to establish exactly what they need to learn and what's the best way to teach them.

There are some basic things that all of them need to learn and understand like gluten, but you don't want to overload them with information. However, if some of them want to keep doing catering, they need to understand, and then we are more than happy to offer more in depth information.

Ultimately we need to adapt to every person's needs. Some people come here just to be around people, to adapt at working in a team, so obviously for them the gluten and the chemistry behind the gluten is not that important.

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Talking to Yann, I realize why he is the Head Baker here at Better Health Bakery. He is a very warm and gentle person and you can instantly understand why people would look up to him, respect and like him very much. He loves bread, but he equally loves working with people and helping them get whatever they need from their time here.

Even though I had been at the bakery for almost two hours now, I was still quite hesitant to try and speak to any of

the trainees. They seemed very focused on their tasks and maybe just a bit reluctant to talk to me. However, once his tasks for the time being were done, Mark, one of the trainees came up to me himself and said: "I'll give you an interview. I want to tell you why I am here, because I am not really here to learn how to bake bread."

***Raluca**: Mark, how did you start coming to the bakery?*

Mark: A friend of mine comes to the bakery during the week to buy bread and he phoned me up and said there is a bakery very near you and it's got a good vibe and they do therapy and they do baking and I thought you might like it, it might be beneficial! So I got in touch with Helen, at the Centre for Better Health and she referred me here.

***Raluca**: Have you baked bread before coming here?*

Mark: No, I've never baked bread before, and when I was chatting to Helen I said: I don't really know if I want to do baking or not. She said that was fine.

I came here because I wanted to rebuild my confidence in relating with people, not so much because I wanted to learn how to bake bread. I thought it will be very good to be in a professional environment and learn to do something that I know absolutely nothing about and then have the experience of the learning process and all the feelings that can come with being in a learning

environment and having to ask questions.

I thought that I would be very insecure about asking questions, but it is a very supportive environment here. Yann is so sweet, he is very gentle.

I didn't want to come in today. I suffer from post traumatic stress disorder, so I was in therapy all day on Monday and it was a very difficult day for me. But actually it is a healing environment here. I am feeling much better being here than if I wasn't here, because we all need to interrelate and that's what this place is doing for me. It's very healing for me to come here!

This place gives you focus: you are working with your hands, you concentrate and you kind of know you are all right, because you are working with other people, you can relate with other people, and they can relate with you.

***Raluca**: Do you enjoy baking bread?*

Mark: I've seen the whole process until the end, with the rye bread that we bake on the day. I've done the whole thing: I've mixed up the dough, I've put it in the oven and taken it out of the oven, and that was very fulfilling.

We get to take left over bread home, usually either a baguette or a country sourdough. I am eating a lot of bread since I've been here. I shouldn't really be eating that much gluten, but this is so much better than the sliced one you get in the shops! It's springy and tasty, and it feels alive!

***Raluca**: Do you like it here? Did you learn anything that will help you when you're not going to be here anymore, apart from the skill of baking bread?*

Mark: Yes I do like it here! I am much more confident since I've started coming. I've also helped on the market stall and that was a lot of fun. It's quite a busy market, so you get to interact with a lot of people. It's been an all-round fulfilling experience.

"This place gives you focus: you are working with your hands, you concentrate and you kind of know you are all right, because you are working with other people, you can relate with other people, and they can relate with you."

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I am really happy Mark agreed to speak to me, as I hope his experience and the way he sees the bakery will inspire more and more people to start baking bread even if not for the bread baking process in itself, but to relax, to see the results of your work and ultimately to be able to share it with other people.

After finishing my chat with Mark, I approached David, the other trainee working at the bakery that day. He had finished mixing and shaping the rye breads that will would be baked in a couple of hours and agreed to speak with me.

***Raluca**: How did you find out about this place?*

David: I was referred to the Centre for Better Health a while back for CBT sessions

(Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) and I just noticed a review, I think in a newspaper, about the Better Health Bakery, so I ended up asking them whether there was a possibility for me to come here.

A long time ago, I was a bespoke shoemaker so I've done craft things before. It's something I haven't done for thirty years, I've done it for about four or five years in my late 20s. This is how I knew that working with my hands and working collectively with other people will help me. I needed to have structure and to make sure I got out of house.

I got more interested in the technicalities, practicalities and the science behind bread baking, the chemistry of making bread, since I've started coming here. But learning to bake bread wasn't really the primary thing for me, the primary thing was the social opportunity. It was all about being around people that I can relate to, and it has worked in that way.

I mean the people that I've worked with here are from all categories: you've got Yann the professional baker, then there's Joe who's volunteering because he wants to learn more about bread making and myself and Mark, we are here, I suppose, more for the health regime.

***Raluca**: Do you enjoy coming here?*

David: Yeah, I do! I feel strange about it because next week is my last week of the three months.

***Raluca**: Are you still going to bake bread after you've finished coming here?*

David: I've not baked bread before or after I've started coming to the bakery. I don't know if I am going to bake bread at home after the training is over. I quite like the repetition to some extent and

working in bulk rather than making just one little loaf. I might do, though. Depends.

***Raluca**: Would you recommend to someone else to come and do this?*

David: Yeah, I definitely would! It might not suit everyone, but I think from what I've hoped to get out of it, it was absolutely ideal and they are really flexible about people who want to get really serious about baking bread, they would give them that kind of information.

It is also very helpful for people who want to be efficient enough to be a part of the team to work alongside people, without slacking and doing what they are asked to do. They have quite a broad spectrum. They offer quite a round of opportunities really. I've also done the bread stall in the market and it was really nice to have a range of interactions and different responsibilities.

***Raluca**: What do you think was the hardest thing when it comes to your experience here?*

David: The hardest thing is stopping. The hardest thing is coming just once a week instead of two to three days a week! But seeing the bigger picture the intention is to have people going through, it is not that they want to take people to stay on, they need to give this opportunity to more people, to help more people going through the process.

***Raluca**: What's been the best about this experience?*

David: I think it's very much a combination of things: there is a nice human interaction,

collaborating and working alongside people and having some responsibilities. We are not here to play, we are here to work and we need to do things in the right order! For me it's been about that mixture between enjoying the physical process and working in a team. Also I've enjoyed the bread making process: the breads are really nice to handle and it's quite pleasing to see them coming out of the oven, to see the finished product of your work.

❊❊

David will finish his training in a week's time and even though he will dearly miss it, he is very happy with what he managed to accomplish in these three months of being part of the Better Health Bakery.

After my chat with David, I hung around the bakery a bit more, taking pictures, looking at the entire process, and secretly dreaming to be a part of a bakery some day, like these guys are.

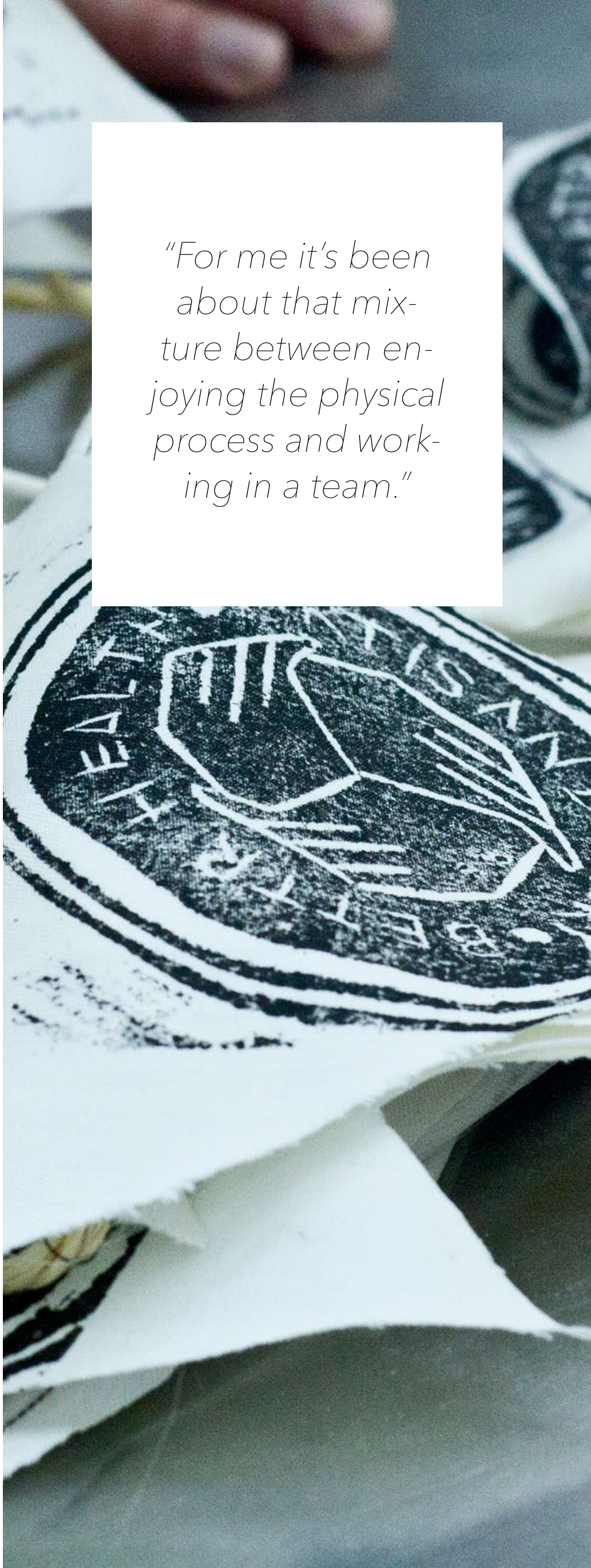
I was still waiting to speak to Joe, one of the volunteers here, because I really wanted to see things from his perspective: why is he giving away his time for this cause?

***Raluca**: How did you decide to volunteer here?*

Joe: I was doing a degree in Medical Sciences and I got to a point when I was eating lots of sandwiches for lunch and dinner and they started giving me heart burn, so I decided to start baking my own bread and I got to the point where I was baking good bread—you know, better than the supermarket, but not amazing.

Now after starting to bake sourdough bread, I don't find the initial breads as nice anymore. They are not as tasty, I don't

"For me it's been about that mixture between enjoying the physical process and working in a team."



even think they look nice anymore. Where is that nice crusty texture, where are the dark bits that give all the flavor to the crust? No wonder kids don't like eating crust, it's just dull and tasteless on supermarket breads.

I was lucky than to get a course at the E5 Bakehouse and while on that course, I thought, "Actually this is quite a nice career." During lunch time, at the course, they allow you to go around the actual bakery and talk to the employees and see the entire process and I just spoke to a couple of them there and they all seemed happy so I thought maybe I will pursue that.

I started volunteering at my local bakery and then I found this place so I thought I'll come here as well. I am hoping to learn enough so that I can find a baking job at some point in the future.

***Raluca**: Are you coming once a week?*

Joe: Yes, I come in every Wednesday. I've started about 4 weeks ago, this is my fifth time. It's been good fun actually. I've started working with these guys, and they are approaching the end of their training.

***Raluca**: So they are better than you?*

Joe: I might be a bit more knowledgeable about the theory, but not as practiced as these guys.

***Raluca**: What have you learned working here, with these guys, not just about bread?*

Joe: When I was in the University, I came down with appendicitis a couple of days before one of my exams and that brought quite a lot of stress at that time. And then, after I had surgery and I was fine, the relationship with my mum deteriorated quite badly.

I was lucky because the University was very understanding and they allowed me to defer my sitting for the following year. At that time I went and got CBT therapy, so I understand a little bit about how important it is to be positive about your mental health. So, when I saw this place I thought: "Oh that's brilliant, I can relate to that in a way!"

The problem is there is not that much support out there for people with mental health issues. The only support I had when


Sourdough
Croissants
£ 1 . 70
Pains au Chocol
£ 1 . 90

I needed it was just some therapy sessions, there wasn't any kind of club in my area that sort of allowed me to socialise etc. I am quite lucky that I have a very strong set of friends and my partner is very understanding, I had lots of people that supported me, but not everyone is that fortunate and the thing is with mental health is that it can isolate you quite dramatically, because you isolate yourself and then you start to retract from society.

So yeah, I just thought I'll get a bit of training and I'll see how a different bakery runs, because this place is so much more than a bakery. I definitely feel that here! At the other bakery everyone has their own job and tasks to perform, they are focused solely on baking, whereas here because the quantity isn't so high they can concentrate on both bread baking and helping people understand the process.

Raluca: *What do you think is the most difficult thing here?*

Joe: I have made so many mistakes since I've started here! For example, last week I used the wrong starter—it was a disaster (they all laugh), but nothing is irreversible. I think this week I am yet to make any more mistakes.

***Raluca**: What's a brilliant day here like?*

Joe: When we've worked efficiently and we are on time and we also have a bit of time to hang around and chat, that's kind of the nicest thing.

❊ ❊

I love how this place has managed to bring so many people together, from different backgrounds, with massively different personalities and outlooks on life and create a brilliant baking team! I wish all of them the very best of luck and hope that this story, their stories, will inspire other people to support projects like Better Health Bakery. I hope volunteers will keep offering their time and knowledge to help other people and that more people will be encouraged to bake bread as a therapy, to give them hope and new beginnings!

WHAT'S NEXT?

You have reached the end of the first issue of Bread in 2014. I hope you have enjoyed the magazine and it has given you something new to think about, and most of all, inspired you to bake bread.

To point back at the discussion about the new year in the welcome, I'm curious to hear what you think of the changes in this issue compared to the back issues from 2012 and 2013 and in what direction you would like to see the magazine evolve. If you have feedback or suggestions, I'm looking forward to your email.

We aim high and want to make this a timeless publication worthy of keeping and sharing even as time goes by and the events described move further into history. Oh, and not that I'm counting or anything, but this issue is our longest yet, at a total of 21,000 words and 90 pages…

The next issue will be published in the middle of the summer, during the last weeks of June. If you are already a subscriber, you will receive the issue automatically once it comes out. To make sure the email reaches you, it's a good idea to add our email address, contact@insanelyinterested.com to your address book (at least when using Gmail, this prevents the message from getting lost in your spam folder).

If you have ideas on topics we should cover in the magazine or would like to pitch an article of your own, you can do it by sending me email through that same address.

On the other hand, if you just found out about BREAD and this was your first experience with the magazine, a one-year subscription is a good way to make sure you'll never miss an issue! It's just $7.99 and gives you three new issues in addition to this one, one for every season. I'd say it's a pretty good deal.

Also, while I think this issue is our best work so far, the older issues aren't bad either. In 2012 and 2013, we met with a lot of interesting bakers, millers, and farmers, and shared their stories on the pages of the magazine. You'll find these issues on the magazine's web site as well.

And finally, if you'd like to stay posted on more updates about BREAD and related projects (as I mentioned in the welcome, I will soon send information about my new bread manifesto / introductory bread book), the mailing list is the place to be.

Now, go get your bowls and ingredients and bake some bread!

Thank you for reading, and happy baking!

Jarkko Laine
Publisher

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