

## ***The Feast: Faenza***

***Desire: Love, Power, Respect, Purpose, Wellness, and Knowledge.***

***Desire moves us to action and compels us to engage what drives us most. What is desire? Where do our desires come from and how are they connected? What can desire motivate?***

***We'll explore what we desire for ourselves, our community and our world. We'll ignite our flames and fuel our collective human potential to tap into our desires to create the community we want to see, a cross-pollination between local and global.***

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Thank you so much for having me here. I apologize for presenting in English, but I wouldn't want you to suffer through my Italian. As the newest member of Future Food Institute's communication team and a token foreigner in an Italian office, I was invited here to share a bit of my own experience with you all tonight.

I've been in Italy for almost a year now, primarily studying for a Master's in Food Culture and Communications at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Piemonte. But my love of Italy didn't start recently. Many Italians that I meet here, and wonder at what I am doing in Italy, ask if one of my parents is Italian. They are surprised when the answer is *no*, that I've ended up in here on my own accord. To be honest my parents did have a little influence as they were the ones to first drag me to Italy at the awkward age of 12, and throw me into Italian public school without any language or cultural preparation.

I'm pretty sure I was miserable for a long period of time during that year. But what was even more difficult was returning to the United States after a year and knowing there was a whole world out there of people, places, adventure and understanding, waiting to be discovered... and there I was 13, and stuck in my hometown, which happens to be a small island floating in the Atlantic ocean.

Two weeks ago I had never heard of the Feast. I had no idea about its history, its purpose or its goals. So when I was invited to join you here this evening, of course I dove head first into researching the event. I learned a lot, but what I my biggest take-away was, is that the Feast is

about connecting and communicating on a global scale. It is about motivating, inspiring and sharing.

I have been asked to talk about desire, for myself, my community and the global community. Desire as it relates to love, power, respect, purpose, wellness and knowledge. So I'll share a story with you that encompasses all of these things.

My Master's program started the 19th of November last. Our class is made up of 24 different people from I think 6 different nationalities. There are a handful of Americans, and some Italians, then Germans, Japanese, a various representatives from South America. We started classes on a Wednesday and the following Thursday was the American holiday Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is a special holiday, because it is not particularly religious, but very American. It's roots are probably not as docile as our modern day celebration, as it also somewhat signifies a decline of the Native American culture in North America.

But the way we celebrate now is with family, friends and food. At university that first week there was chit chat about some of the Americans hosting Thanksgiving, but no one seemed too eager to take the reigns. You see, being in charge means cooking a whole turkey, something not so easy to find in Italy and similarly not so easy to accommodate in every Italian apartment (so many are without ovens). The thought of missing the opportunity to share a small bit of my American heritage in Italy made me sad, as did the thought of not being able to gorge myself with a traditional meal of American food.

In the end I bit the bullet and announced I would be happy to host all 24 of us in the apartment. I hunted down a turkey, which I learned in you need to refer to in the feminine, tacchina, unless you want to end up with a 15 kilo tacchino. Five friends joined me the evening before the party to roast a 7 kilo bird crammed into a tiny oven. There was a lot of smoke, a lot of anxiety and a lingering scent of turkey fat whenever I turned on the oven after that night.

On Thursday evening 23 of my classmates joined my roommate and I in our apartment. Everyone brought a dish. Americans brought the essentials: stuffing, mashed potatoes, gravy, and of course the turkey was there but other classmates just brought what they wanted to contribute. It was a wonderful way to start our year. A celebration of so many different people coming together over food in a way that blended tradition with innovation.

But food communities are not always so simple.

When I arrived here it was first and foremost to follow a passion for food, and writing in particular. I dove into our Master's program with a hopeful heart, excited to explore various facets of food, and determined to use food, meals and eating as a vehicle to communicate and present individual thoughts on culture, life and diversity.

I want to make change through food.

I learned something else the past nine months. That food is sensitive. That it's individual. And that it is subjective. But for all of the subjectivity surrounding tastes, likes, desires, there is substantial impact that comes from our eating habits.

Food is alive. It's grown, it's killed. It affects us. We get energy, which allows us to function as human beings.

We affect the world through food. It is social, environmental, cultural, global, local. We create collective identities surrounding food: vegan, pork free, organic only.

We create communities through food. We host dinner parties with like minded friends. We eat at restaurants that represent our tastes and our likes, our desires.

Food can just as easily make barriers, as it breaks barriers.

Being an American in Italy can be tricky. I come from a country that is referred to as a "melting pot" so it is no wonder our culinary traditions are varied, mixed, and infused. There is no right or wrong when it comes to cooking and eating, and as you might know, it is completely acceptable to eat breakfast at dinner time. Instead, here in Italy, you learn that cappuccino's are for breakfast consumption only, that meatballs are delicious but not with spaghetti, and that "how to make a typical dish" is a grounds for discussion that could consume an entire Sunday afternoon.

If we want to create a truly global community, especially around food, it's important open our heart and mind to the ways of others. You have to understand yourself first: understand your own desires, your own passions, and your own purpose, before you are ready to understand others. I can easily bring my own "local" understanding to a new community, but it won't be effective unless those in the community are receptive.

So here's where I stand on the tuesday (the you and I), on bringing the local to the global. Remember that before we are a community, before we are a country, and before we are a world, we are individuals, and none of us are the same. If we live well, we live to always better ourselves, follow our desires, and share our desires. There is no "right" way to eat, or right way to live, or right way to think. There are only different ways. Different ways that can scare us, that can inspire us, and that can expand us.

So let's take tonight to explore and expand ourselves in light of the beautiful community we have in front of us.

Thank you.