



Amy Domini

# The secret's in the sauce

What my father's recipe for pasta marinara says about the future of capitalism.

**A**S THE DAUGHTER OF A NEAPOLITAN, I GREW UP eating pasta with marinara sauce. My father didn't always make it from scratch, but he did so often enough for me to follow his recipe through memories. Fresh tomatoes were not always available, but we canned them so we had the base for the red sauce all year.

The name "marinara" means "mariner's sauce." There is some debate as to whether the sauce got its start with Spanish or Neapolitan sailors' wives. Since Spain owned Naples during the key years (the first recorded recipe book containing the sauce, written in Naples, is dated 1692), it is a meaningless debate. The important thing is that early on, the healing aspects of tomatoes were discovered, and sailors used the sauce to cure and prevent scurvy.

Tomatoes originated in the New World, and while they probably came from Peru, they were grown at least as far north as Mexico by the time the Spanish sailed. Since the fruit could be dried and was acidic enough to stay preserved, it could be carried long distances. The mariners who carried it could survive at sea without fresh vegetables.

But at some point in history, humankind seemed to stop noticing the connection between the benefits of what we eat and our health. We moved away from herbal remedies toward pills and gadgets. A stiff neck was no longer treated with a warm hand towel wrapped firmly around our neck and fastened with a baby diaper pin. Muscle relaxants became the cure of first resort. I've had friends suffer a torn meniscus and have knee surgery, but most of these injuries used to heal with time and quadriceps exercises.

I admit to admiration for Luddites, but I am not one. I enjoy modern comforts. Still, I cannot help but wonder if we are getting less when we modernize. The stories in the press back me up. It turns out that women of a certain age who take calcium tablets don't benefit as much as women who rely on diet to meet that need. Milk does it better.

I recently read Michael Pollan's *In Defense of Food*, in which he advises us to eat "real" food. I had to laugh when I read that. I remembered my mother scooping something called "Cool Whip" onto some heated pears for dessert. My father leapt to his feet. "What are you doing? Are you feeding our children plastic?" It

wasn't plastic, but it also wasn't exactly whipped cream. In 2007, Patrick Di Justo wrote in a *Wired* magazine article entitled "Cool Whip" that it is mostly water and air, although it costs twice as much as homemade whipped cream.

Old-fashioned food is cheaper and better for you. Eating a garlic clove when you start to feel sick isn't nearly as expensive as cold pills; gargling with warm salt water actually feels pretty good (I admit, eating garlic does not) and does relieve most sore throats... but where's the profit?

How many ancient wisdoms have we let fall aside because they were more trouble and less entertaining than being a patient and getting a pill? My mom boiled water to clear her sinuses. I don't know; maybe pills do a better job, but they cost a lot and might do some damage, too.

My father took my temperature by touching his forehead to mine. If mine felt hot to him, I had a temperature. Then came the mercury thermometer. Probably the worst part of that was uncovered in 2001 when 7.4 tons of mercury-contaminated glass from a thermometer factory was found to be polluting the area watershed after having been dumped unprotected. Unilever eventually paid a fine, closed the factory and cleaned up the mess. At least thermometers aren't made of mercury anymore. Mercury thermometers have been banned in most of the world.

When I was upset, I was given hot milk. When it was hot out, I sat with my feet in a bucket of ice water. Sleeping pills were not even considered. Oh, and generating electricity to cool homes and retail spaces ultimately means that power companies, which typically burn fossil fuels, burn more. This leads to greenhouse gases, higher global temperatures and more air-conditioning.

One of the concerns I have with the miracles of capitalism is that it has run over the miracles of nature. Corporate profits lie behind much of the erosion of land and the poisoning of air and water. Responsible investors use a battery of approaches to shine light on these issues. But let us also be mindful of what we can do to keep alive the wisdom of prior generations and not fall prey to the marketing myth of ever newer and "better" products. ■

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