

PAULA'S PILAF

July 1968, West Dover, VT. It was the third year of the Northeast Craft Fair. Twelve hours until booth set up. I had decided to spend the night in my newly purchased 1960 Futura convertible, top down, to enjoy the cool summer eve.

Waking with the sun the next morning, I made my way to an ancient country market I had stumbled upon the previous year. Gathering up a fried egg sandwich and coffee, I settled comfortably on the large rock growing at the foot of the market's porch for a leisurely, al fresco breakfast.

Sipping the bitter coffee, I gingerly removed the steaming hot, white toast and fried egg from their neatly folded wax paper cradle. Taking a tentative bite, I tasted the perfect mix of salt, grease and cholesterol. Nice.

Through the egg-scented morning fog, I noticed two women moving toward me. One, a 1960's era suburban housewife, looked like a younger version of my Mom. The other wore a brown ponytail, brightly colored, homemade clothing and layers of silver ornaments, cascading from ear to foot.

Having grabbed my attention, the one jangling silver asked, "Do you know where the craft show is?" Up close, I could see she was an older woman, at least 30.

Holding out five ring-laden fingers and a bracelet-encased arm, she announced, "Paula. I'm a jeweler."

Accepting the proffered hand, I answered hesitantly, "David. It's at the ski lodge."

"I know that." Paula replied, clearly irritated with my answer. "But where is the ski lodge?"

Moaning a typical 18-year-old's sigh of resignation, I mumbled, sotto voce, "What the hell, I'll finish my breakfast in the car," and then, more loudly, "Follow me." Wrapping my breakfast back into its by-now-soggy wax paper

swaddling, I moved toward the Futura, jumped in, gunned the engine and pulled out, followed by the ladies in their mini-bus. Ten minutes later, we pulled onto the weedy, white gravel parking area in front of Snow Lake Lodge's weather-beaten, Alpine-style ski hut at the foot of Mount Snow.

A small, raggedy group of exhibitors had gathered on the ramp that lead to the lodge's double front doors.

"If you want an indoor spot you have to get in line over there," I stated, indicating the gathering mass on the ramp. "When they open the doors, just go in and pick out any space you want. I think they'll open around 8:30. It's five bucks."

Waving goodbye, the two women parked their mini-bus. I headed off to greet and meet the mornings' arrivals.

In the year 2000, the population density of West Dover, VT was 40 people per square mile. In 1968, it was far fewer. There were few places to shop or eat, so most exhibitors ate at the Lodge or camped and cooked. I wasn't tent-camping, but I prepared my dinner each night on a small, portable butane stove using aluminum Boy-Scout-style pots and pans and a neat, interlocking knife, fork and spoon set for cooking.

After set-up, I visited with people I hadn't seen since last summer, smoked a pipe or two, then staked out a spot in the parking/camping area. Returning to the market under a darkening blue sky, I shopped for my evening meal.





“Egg sandwich again?”

I glanced over my shoulder. Nothing there but a pile of cellophane-wrapped, enriched flour, beyond-marshmallow-soft loaves of white bread. Was that bread rack speaking? I made a quick mental note: “Smoke pipe after dinner, not before.”

Paula, hidden until then by shelving, stepped around the bread.

“Are you having an egg sandwich again?” she repeated.

Relieved to realize that the bread was not speaking to me, I answered, “Nope, hamburger and baked beans.”

“Doesn’t sound too appealing.”

“It’s easy, quick and cheap.”

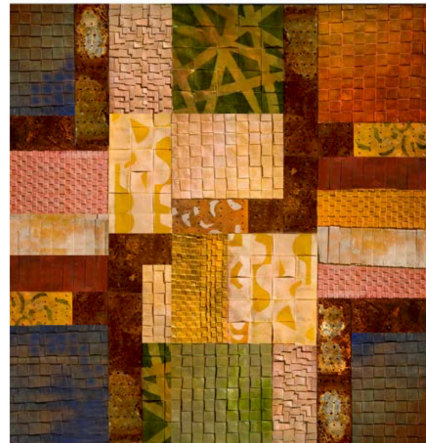
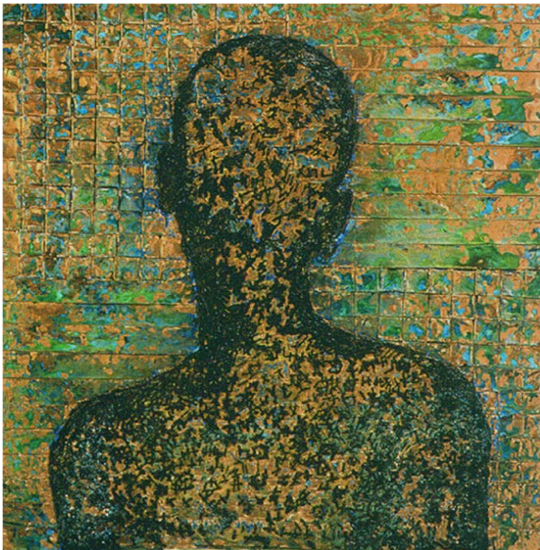
She nodded in agreement.

“You want some company for dinner? I make a great pilaf.”

“Pilaf?”

“Instead of canned beans and hamburger,” she suggested.

“Pilaf,” I repeated, “what’s pilaf?”



Paula smiled, “Sautéed rice, garlic, raisins, curry, salt and pepper, lots of vegetables. We can add some chicken if you like.”

I grew up in a family that consumed all of its food-stuffs in clearly defined, neatly proscribed units. No mixing allowed. When Mom cooked, she prepared boiled white rice in pot one. In pot two, vegetables simmered to the color of an Army jeep and the consistency of limp noodles. It made no difference what particular vegetable was being prepared, all were served glutinous and thoroughly olive-grey. Pot three held either a leathery beef product or chicken, sticky to the touch, but sawdust-dry on the tongue. (The chicken was an old Russian recipe of my great-grandmother’s.) Raisins were never a dinner item. They would likely serve as a postprandial snack. Having never experienced curry, I assumed it was a vegetable or grain I had never heard of, but if someone else was willing to cook, my attitude was, “Sure, sounds great.”

Back at the parking lot, I set up the camp stove while Paula cut up the vegetables. The heavenly aroma of sautéing onions and garlic quickly drew a curious crowd.

“What are you cooking?”

“Doesn’t matter,” answered Paula, “everything begins with onions and garlic.”

“Can we join you?” they asked.

“Sure,” Paula replied.

“Absolutely,” I added.

Everyone attending the evening’s fête contributed what they could. Someone had a guitar. Bill Helwig had a portable 45 rpm record player the size of a shoe box, and a stack of 45s. Jug-wine and homemade beer were served in handmade mugs that would be displayed the next day in someone’s booth. The festivities ran far

into the night. Paula’s pilaf disappeared, having served an assembled crew of a dozen or so exhibitors.

The next day, talk of the dinner spread and by the end of the wholesale day, Paula had been asked to repeat her pilaf. Numerous volunteers stepped forward, offering to help shop and cook. That evening, two additional stoves appeared. The party moved to the lower level of the ski hut. Afterward the infamous “Ice Skating Party of ‘68” got underway on the resort’s indoor ice rink...sans skates. But, that’s another story.

Paula Gollhardt-Leighton and I became close friends during the show. We remained close until her premature death in 1992. Paula was a jeweler, macramé artist, clothing maker, and photographer. She and her husband Henri Leighton, both jewelers, opened and operated The Beautiful Things Factory in Scotch Plains, NJ, for 19 years. Paula served on the Board of the Peter’s Valley Craft School and was the Director of the American Craft Retailers Association. A self-described hippy in patchwork clothes, Paula not only sold her own jewelry, but made it her business to support numerous other craftspeople, promoting them and selling their work through her gallery.

When Lois Moran, then Director of Research and Programs for the ACC (American Craft Council) compiled *The Craftsman’s Cookbook* in 1974, Paula’s pilaf was included.

In the introduction to the cookbook, Lois wrote, “This book was done in salute to American craftsmen, not alone because they are so often inventive cooks, but because they are very special people...born of a humility that makes them the friendliest of artists.”¹

I simply could not agree more. ❖

1. Lois Moran, *The Craftsman’s Cookbook* (New York: American Crafts Council, 1972), p. 4.