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[WHAT'S IN YOUR BOTTLE?:](#) A MULTIMEDIA DOCUMENTARY

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ABSTRACT

“What’s In Your Bottle?” is a multimedia documentary about the production, consumption, and appreciation of true extra virgin olive oil. The story is told by the operators of Fontanaro Organic Farm Houses in Paciano, Italy; the co-owner of Cleo’s Fine Oils and Vinegars in Annapolis, Maryland; a consumer family in Saverna Park, Maryland; and experts who are researching and writing about extra virgin olive oil. While these faces of the Italian and American olive oil industry highlight the issues of regulation and awareness of quality olive oil, motion images transport viewers between an Italian olive grove and an American kitchen table. This written accompaniment provides a research-based view of the subject, an analysis of the processes used to create the work, and other supplementary text. View the multimedia documentary at <http://commedia.psu.edu/news/story/olive-oil-whats-in-your-bottle>.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Food is not just a source of sustenance. It is also a source of cultural experiences communicated through the sense of taste. But, those cultural experiences extend far beyond the act of consumption. They begin with the first step of production, often the plotting of land for farming, and continue through a relationship between the producer and the consumer. Globalization makes it possible for consumers to afford foods of foreign origins, but it interferes with consumer-producer relationships. Olive oil fraud expert Tom Mueller addresses the topic of globalization and how it makes unclear origins of food increasingly popular in America. Extra virgin olive oil appears regularly in quality food shops and on supermarket shelves with identical labels. But, the contents of those similar-looking bottles differ greatly in production and value, and exemplify the purpose of international movements like Slow Food.

Slow Food: An International Movement

The Slow Food movement advocates the idea of food awareness, or knowing where and who produces one's food. It also emphasizes quality over cost. When it began, Slow Food focused on wine, but it soon broadened its efforts to traditional foods like extra virgin olive oil.

Carlo Petrini, the International President of Slow Food for twenty-five years, founded Slow Food in northern Italy in 1986 in response to the "incipient globalization" evident with a new McDonald's by the Spanish Steps in Rome (Petrini 8). Although Petrini could not reverse the challenges of globalization and industrialization, he developed a metaphysical solution to ever-increasing food miles. Writer of Italian politics Geoff Andrews touches on this point in his book

on Slow Food. He says Petrini believes the consumption of food should not be divorced from its production. Rather, it is the final step of the production process and, therefore, consumers are “co-producers” (Andrews 90, 102).

Although Petrini coined the term “co-producer” and initiated Italy’s Slow Food movement, the cost of industrialized food was not a foreign concept at the time. Since the onset of post-World War II industrialization, depopulation had been plaguing the Italian countryside, more supermarkets had been penetrating urban areas, and the farming community had been exhibiting a loss (Petrini 65-67). Even though Italy had been, and for the most part still is, a country renowned for hosting numerous local food specialists, consumers started buying into mass-produced food as early as the 1950s (Petrini 93). In Petrini’s mind, this change was repulsive and demanded action not only in Italy, but globally.

To Petrini’s satisfaction, Slow Food reached an international level three years after its birth. According to the Slow Food website, 100,000 members in more than 150 countries now advocate the movement (“Slow Food”). By the second millennium, Slow Food reached America, where 25,000 members support its mission to promote “good, clean and fair food for all” (“Slow Food”).

Extra Virgin Olive Oil: A Valuable Product

One food product widely associated with Slow Food in Italy is extra virgin olive oil. Slow Food annually publishes *Guida agli Extravirgini*, a guide that features highly ranked and taste-tested oils, the companies that produce them and their individual characteristics. The 2013 edition includes 772 companies and 1,131 extra virgin olive oils (“Guida”). Also, since 2006, Slow Food has held *Il Gioca del Piacere*, or “The Pleasure Game,” an annual event that promotes extra virgin olive oil (Piumatti). But, why does Slow Food deem this Italian food product worthy of yearly publications and events?

In its most simple terms, extra virgin olive oil is a fresh, quality food product that carries with it regional traditions. More specifically, extra virgin olive oil is a fruit juice obtained from the first pressing of olives. The United States Department of Agriculture, or USDA, introduced the first officially documented definition for extra virgin olive oil in 1948, eleven years before the founding of Italy's olive oil regulating organization, the International Olive Council, or IOC. Nevertheless, both organizations define extra virgin olive oil as "virgin olive oil which has excellent flavor and odor and a free fatty acid content, expressed as oleic acid, of not more than 0.8 grams per 100 grams" ("United States," *International*).

Although the USDA and IOC's definition of extra virgin olive oil is the most up-to-date, Roman author Pliny the Elder's encyclopedic account, which was published in the first century, identifies what is now called extra virgin olive oil. In "The Nature of the Olive and of New Olive Oil," from Pliny's *Book XV: The Natural History of the Fruit-Trees*, he writes, "the first oil of all, produced from the raw olive before it has begun to ripen, is considered preferable to all the others in flavour; in this kind, too, the first droppings of the press are the most esteemed, diminishing gradually in goodness and value" (Bostock).

From the time Pliny published his early encyclopedia until the onset of globalization, olive oil was produced locally, was guaranteed fresh and matched the quality of true extra virgin olive oil. Originally, it was used as perfume when it was discovered in the Middle East during the third century B.C. (Mueller *Extra* 29-30). Since then, olive oil has crossed the ocean and now appeals to many American consumers.

Journalist Tom Mueller says the culinary and health benefits of extra virgin olive oil spark great interest in olive oil, especially in America (Mueller). Scientific research claims extra virgin olive oil plays an important role in lowering cholesterol, controlling glycaemic levels, and preventing osteoporosis, obesity, cancer and heart disease (Wahlqvist 350-352). In the 1970s, soon after heart disease rose nation-wide and literature on the Mediterranean diet filled American

bookshelves, olive oil consumption more than quadrupled in twelve years (Meneley 679). More recently, olive oil sales in the United States doubled between 1991 and 2003, and tripled from 1990 and 2012 (Vossen 1094, Xiong 9).

Even though American olive oil consumption is booming, consumption in other nations is far greater. There remains a significant difference among the average annual consumption of olive oil in America, Italy and Greece, the world's top consumer. The average American consumes less than one liter per year (Mueller 166). Meanwhile, a typical Italian annually consumes thirteen liters, which amounts to about half of what a normal Greek consumes in a year (Mueller *Extra* 81).

Increasing olive oil consumption in countries like America legitimizes globalization. But, it challenges the preservation of traditional extra virgin olive oil production, a cause near and dear to Slow Food members. One can understand the need for globalization based on the fact that California, the largest olive oil producing state, supplies only two percent of the olive oil consumed in America. Therefore, the United States relies on Italy for the majority of its olive oil imports. According to *oliveoiltimes.com*, Italy supplies 143,656 tons of olive oil to America every year, almost twice as much as the amount provided by Spain, the world's leading producer of olive oil (Butler). But, small Italian producers cannot possibly satisfy American cravings for extra virgin olive oil. This results in a deceiving compromise between producers and consumers that Mueller calls "the used car sales of the food industry" (Mueller).

Various studies have proven the majority of supermarket oils are not "extra virgin" when they claim to be. One such study, released in July 2010 and conducted by researchers at the University of California, Davis, found that 73% of top-selling imported olive oil brands in major California supermarkets failed international standards for extra virgin olive oil (Flynn).

In his book *Extra Virginity: The Sublime and Scandalous World of Olive Oil*, Mueller addresses this issue. He exposes how olive oil companies cut extra virgin olive oil with canola or

seed oils to make a widely available olive oil that seems to be the more valuable, healthy product. The companies get away with labeling this degraded product as “extra virgin” because USDA and IOC standards are voluntary.

Mueller expresses concern because he estimates only 30% of consumers understand this problem. The majority of olive oil consumers accept the bland taste and unhealthiness of falsely labeled olive oil in order to save money. “I don’t have a problem with people buying whatever oil they want as long as it’s correctly labeled,” Mueller said in a Skype conversation. “If you want to buy cheap, smelly, rancid oil, go for it. But I think the label should indicate you’re not buying first quality” (Mueller).

Thus, the term “extra virgin” has become devoid of meaning and extra virgin olive oil has become less identifiable. Mueller concludes there is more opportunity to falsely label extra virgin olive oil the farther it travels from the producer to the consumer (Mueller *Extra* 100). However, Mueller is not the only expert who points out this problem. Researchers, who published their project findings in *Reconnecting Consumers, Producers and Food*, agree extra virgin olive oil loses more of its connection to its origins as the distance between the producer and the consumer increases (Kneafsey 6-7). French social scientist Claude Fischler generalizes this issue in his article titled “Food, self and identity.” He says, “Modern food has become in the eyes of the eater an ‘unidentified edible object,’ devoid of origin or history, with no respectable past-in short, without identity” (Fischler 289).

The Italian-American Olive Oil Relationship

The most basic way to reestablish this lost identity of extra virgin olive oil is to connect the consumer with the producer or, as Mueller says, “to build a bridge between the people who are making it and the people who are getting it” (Mueller). While globalization is the underlying cause of this lack of connection, it also makes connection more difficult because greater distances

separate the producer and the consumer. Although most American consumers do not have the opportunity to travel to the site of Italian extra virgin olive oil production, they do have the resources to learn about the product they consume.

Mueller believes the Internet is perfectly suited to build a bridge that involves story telling and that connects people (Mueller). Most modern extra virgin olive oil producers maintain information about their business, its history and their products through online media. Further, they use online media as a way to provide personal contact information that may not be featured on product labels. By providing production information and personal contact information, producers are proactively solving the problems of globalization. It is then up to consumers to pursue their part. They must develop a relationship with the producer through online research. The result is maximized cultural experiences taken in with every drop of extra virgin olive oil.

Fontanaro to Cleo's: A Process of Connection

From the harvesting of the olive groves at Fontanaro Organic Farm Houses in Italy to the sale of Fontanaro extra virgin olive oil at Cleo's Fine Oils and Vinegars in America, "What's in Your Bottle" traces the producer-consumer relationship. It highlights the appreciation of extra virgin olive oil and the value of knowing its origins despite the challenges of globalization.

Although specialty food stores like Cleo's Fine Oils and Vinegars are reliable sources of true Italian extra virgin olive oil in America, they are threatened by globalization. This is concerning for small Italian producers who wish to continue to profit from their olive oil operation. Without a relationship with the producer or an appreciation of extra virgin olive oil, consumers are more willing to sacrifice quality for cost and unclear origins at a supermarket. If they buy into falsely labeled extra virgin olive oil, consumers will miss out on the cultural experiences of tasting and connecting with the producer of true Italian extra virgin olive oil.

Chapter 2

Pre-Production

A Road Less Taken: Around Italy in 105 Days

Growing up in rural Pennsylvania and eating fresh produce from a backyard garden, I thought I was familiar with the idea of the small producer. But, it was not until I studied abroad in Italy that I got my first real taste of it.

Between attending classes in Perugia during the spring 2012 semester, I traveled on weekends to all twenty Italian regions. Although it took me 105 days to discover more than forty Italian cities among those regions, I developed a new understanding and appreciation of food produced locally by generational family businesses.

Since my first weekend in Italy, I was hooked on learning more about local foods, their production and the experience of eating those foods produced on adjacent land. During that first weekend, I attended my program orientation at an *agriturismo*, or farmhouse resort, in the hills of Tuscany. I was exposed to the Italian slow lifestyle. There, unlike anywhere in America, I was able to see land beyond my own backyard from which my food was grown while I was savoring its freshness and flavors.

Of all the cities I visited, however, Perugia seemed to me the best example of small producer. After all, I had spent hours hiking through the city saying *ciao* to the food vendors that lined the streets. Also, I enjoyed my free time chatting with some of those vendors, including a pasta-maker, a cheese connoisseur, a *contadina*, and a butcher, who gifted to me a bottle of Italian extra virgin olive oil when I said my farewell.

The words on that slim, green-tinted glass bottle read “Olio Extravergine di Oliva, 100% Italiano, San Sebastiano.” I admired it not only because I could comprehend its text after four months of studying the Italian language, but also because it was unlike any other olive oil bottle I had seen in American supermarkets. So I rolled it up in my clothes and packed it safely in my suitcase, eager to taste it when I returned home to Pennsylvania.

Olive Oil Oracle: Discovering the Origins and Truth

It was not until I was settled back in my American home that I had my first taste of true extra virgin olive oil and it was from that bottle that I eagerly unpacked from my suitcase. The first drop of *Olio Extravergine di Oliva* that touched my tongue opened my senses to something completely different from what I had been ignorantly drizzling over salads and sautéing vegetables in for years. At that point, I realized there was something missing in the clear plastic bottle of “extra virgin” olive oil in my kitchen cabinet. I scanned its label and noticed on the back, in fine print, that the olives used to make the oil were from three different countries, including Italy.

And so I began my quest to learn as much as I could about what made the extra virgin olive oil I was used to different from the extra virgin olive oil I brought back from Italy. One step in my approach was reading Tom Mueller’s *Extra Virginity: The Sublime and Scandalous World of Olive Oil*, which reveals much about olive oil fraud and lack of label information. Mueller writes that increased demands for olive oil along with a finite number of local producers result in a compromised product. Another step in understanding the difference between supermarket extra virgin olive oil and that from small, local producers involved reading Carlo Petrini’s *Slow Food: The Case for Taste*. The book proves that extra virgin olive oil is a global product promoted particularly by quality-conscious members of the Slow Food movement. Finally, Pliny’s *Natural*

History informed me of the centuries-long tradition of extra virgin olive oil production, which continues among today's non-industrial producers.

With all this information about extra virgin olive oil, I grew curious as to its role in both Italian and American cultures. Several articles I read noted that American consumption of olive oil was rapidly increasing and that Californian producers cannot possibly meet consumer demands. This encouraged me to discover how consumers on the east coast could possibly purchase quality extra virgin olive oil and how they could connect to its far-away producer.

I then researched quality food stores in America and found Cleo's Fine Oils and Vinegars in Annapolis, a town in Maryland only seventy miles from my home. After browsing through the store's various oils, I discovered they sell a type of oil, Fontanaro organic extra virgin olive oil, which is produced from olives grown just eighteen miles away from where I studied in Perugia. I then worked backwards to find that oil's producer, the Pinelli family, and I began to regularly contact Alina Pinelli and Saleta Cameron, the co-owner of Cleo's Fine Oils and Vinegars.

From Mind to Matter: Planning My Multimedia Project

At that point, I knew my journalistic judgment was accurate. One of my narrators, Alina, was an Italian with a vast knowledge of as well as a passion for extra virgin olive oil. Also, my subject of extra virgin olive oil production, from the Italian grove to the American table, offered great visual storytelling opportunities. Further, Mueller's book provided a foundation for my project and I arranged that Mueller would serve as my expert narrator on the subject. From these elements, I was set to produce a story integrating audio and video.

Another aspect that made the planning of my multimedia project possible was accessibility. Alina, Saleta and Tom were open to communication and easy to reach through email and Skype. Further, they were generous sources for networking with other characters and expressed enthusiasm for my work. Saleta put me in touch with a customer of Fontanaro oil,

Sharon Simon, and Alina connected me with Saverio Pandolfi, an expert on extra virgin olive oil and a member of Slow Food. Also, Alina willingly supplied me with research material about extra virgin olive oil, specifically information relevant to the region of Umbria and to Fontanaro.

Although my planning and research went quite smoothly, challenges arose periodically. During the planning of my project, for example, I found obstacles in generating ideas from professional examples and understanding the possibility of failure. First of all, although authors such as Mueller and Petrini have addressed my topic thoroughly in literature, there exists minimal relevant photojournalistic work. One can stumble upon ‘how it’s made’ videos about olive oil production and non-professional documentaries by tourists about their olive oil experiences in Tuscany. But, a work that tracks production from farm to table between Italian and American cultures and extends deep into the issues within the industry does not yet exist. Although it was promising to know my work would be original for its medium, I determinedly searched for work from which to develop a style and ideas.

I began to examine the work of Penny De Los Santos, a professional food, travel and portrait photographer. Her still photographs, particularly those in the “Food in Process” portfolio on her website, express a mood that I imagined in my work. The dramatic light she achieves comes from planning out shoots around the position of the sun. The simplistic backgrounds and graphic compositions result from keen attention to detail. And the selection and arrangement of subjects in each photo play key roles in portraying a process related to food. Together, these are elements I wanted to integrate into my own work.

Once I gained enough knowledge about what I wanted to include in my work, including its topic, characters and style, I began to plan logistics of equipment and travel. My first step was purchasing flight tickets, which I did after confirming several times with Alina the olive harvest dates. I also considered how many days in Italy would allot me enough time to gather footage sufficient for my work with some leeway if my original plans would go awry. I developed several

potential itineraries accounting for various weather conditions, as well as an equipment list and a travel budget.

Although it seemed as though a flight reservation secured the reality of my project, I knew work still needed to be continued. I familiarized myself with the camera and audio equipment I planned to use for my project to ensure I could focus on the content of my work rather than technical operations. Another task I pursued was maintaining contact with my subjects. Not only was it important to stay up-to-date on situations that could affect my plans, but also it was vital to increase my subjects' trust in me and my work. I regularly contacted Alina, Tom and Saleta. I also continued my search for examples of visual, audible and written work that expanded my knowledge of extra virgin olive oil. I knew that going into such an extensive project as a non-professional journalist required that I be as prepared as possible to document what I had not yet witnessed first-hand.

Chapter 3

Production

Getting There and Getting Settled

Although going to Italy may be on the wish lists of many college students, I packed my suitcase with the mindset that this was more than a trip across the Atlantic. I had spent months preparing for this project. During that time, my subjects' expectations had nearly reached the level of my own expectations for what I was about to produce. Not only did that increase my nerves, but it also created in me a desire to succeed with my plans. With one week in Italy to gather footage, I understood I had one shot to produce a work that would showcase my achievements as a photojournalist in college and lead to employment opportunities in my field.

I boarded the plane bound for Rome with mixed emotions and a carry-on suitcase filled with camera and audio recording equipment. I imagined this experience was identical to the career path I wished to pursue following graduation. I fantasized success with my project and was determined to work towards that dream. I thought the whole process would not be too difficult because I would be doing what I love most: immersing myself in and learning about Italian culture through my photographic lens.

Then, at other times, I experienced nervousness and fear in being an amateur photojournalist taking on an assignment in a foreign country. I triple-checked that I packed all necessary equipment and made sure it all functioned properly. But, I still worried that I would lose an essential microphone, dirty a lens with olive oil or fail to return with everything I had taken out of the country. Also, I thought I had established a firm relationship with my subjects

through Skype chats and frequent emails. However, I was a little worried about meeting them in person, and was unfamiliar with the lifestyles and specific location I was about to be immersed in.

The nine-hour flight seemed more useful for thought than for sleep. I tried to keep myself from over-thinking my project, but I also wanted to be prepared for all possibilities. I understood that I could better solve problems as they arise by thinking ahead, but I also knew thinking too much could create false expectations. What if I didn't have a ride from the airport in Rome to Fontanaro Organic Farm Houses? What if my subjects were not comfortable being in front of the camera? What if it rained every day? Most of my worries were out of my control, but they drained my mind of many the optimistic thoughts until touching down in the Vatican City.

Jet-lagged but motivated, I transitioned smoothly into Italian culture with the Pinelli family, which has been producing Fontanaro extra virgin olive oil for over three decades. My new surroundings seemed to offer great visual potential and my subjects expressed themselves in a way that would effectively tell the story. Although my equipment was charged, organized for use and ready to go, I dedicated Saturday, my first day, to spend time with my subjects and to express my true interest in their lives. I did not want them to think I was a heartless photojournalist who was stalking their every move. This day of not shooting also helped me adapt to the environment and lifestyle of the Pinellis.

The differences between living in American and Italian cultures became clear that Saturday. The rush of American living opposed the slow, relaxed atmosphere in the Italian countryside. The typical Italian day began around ten in the morning with a cappuccino and seemed to pick up with a three-o'clock lunch of fresh pasta, bread drizzled with extra virgin olive oil and a glass of red wine. Plans made earlier on in the day seemed to occur near sun-down and concluded before dinner no earlier than nine at night. From the start, I knew this aspect of Italian culture could conflict with my American, fast-paced lifestyle and could hinder gathering all the footage I hoped to gather.

Gathering B-Roll and Interviews in Italy

Although I wanted to disguise myself in Italian culture, I began to gather natural sounds of birds chirping and olive tree branches shaking in the breeze before most Italians rolled out of bed in the morning. I wanted to shoot non-human matter first to get my subjects accustomed to seeing me equipped with camera gear before the camera turned to focus on them. My goal was to capture my subjects in their most natural state. Gradually working up to turn my attention to them was a successful solution.

When I first set up for shooting around the Pinelli family, it seemed they were comfortable with my presence. However, it seemed they were more concerned about the appearance of their surroundings than the tasks they were performing at the time. I had to make it clear I was there to document rather than stage this story. For example, the first event I shot was one of Alina's cooking classes involving an olive oil demonstration. I had to remind Alina that she should not direct her attention to me and that she did not have to tidy up the counter space for it to look nice for the camera.

Later that day, I visited the mill to document the transformation of olives to extra virgin olive oil. Here I noticed that my presence was distracting in the beginning. The workers are accustomed to seeing tourists visit the mill and take pictures inside, but my camera rig on a tripod was much more out-of-the-ordinary to them. However, after a couple hours, the workers seemed to turn their full attention back to their tasks without worrying about where I was.

This same situation occurred when I began to shoot the workers who harvest the olives. At first they would watch me as I moved around filming, but they soon became at ease and more preoccupied with their tasks. Once this happened, I was able to move closer to get different angles and more detail shots of their work without being a distraction.

I focused much of my attention on shooting steps of olive oil production from tree to bottle because I knew I would not have the opportunity to capture these processes once I returned to the states. However, I compiled a list of other scenes I wanted to capture to make the story complete and true to the lifestyle I was observing at Fontanaro Organic Farm Houses. A couple items on my list included an olive oil tasting, a home-cooked family dinner and the celebration of the first extra virgin olive oil. The celebration was an important element in the story, but was difficult to capture because of the little amount of natural light at nine at night. As a result, I tried to take advantage of the available light from candles and the grill fire to make my footage work.

Although I had set out to conduct interviews during my first day of shooting, I did not interview my subjects until the third and fourth days. This was because of the difference between American and Italian cultures, and also because I did not want to be so overbearing that it would affect my subjects' naturalness around the camera. I wanted to respect the work they had to do to keep the business running successfully, but I also wanted to make it clear that interviews were essential to my plan; interviews provide me a sense of direction in finding video and audio footage that fits the narrative.

Then, during the interviews, I discovered the importance of phrasing words when working with subjects whose first language is not English. My subjects seemed to understand my questions, but I had to often rephrase the questions for them to fully understand. This language barrier was not so severe because I studied Italian prior to the trip. However, I still was not fluent enough to carry on every conversation in Italian.

After I had filmed interviews of Lucia (mother), Alina (daughter) and Giovanni (son), I was able to capture visual proof of the points they made. While some of these points were straightforward, I used creativity to depict other points. For example, the three subjects refer to their deceased father/husband. If I were to use this narrative in my work, I decided to show this through an old family photo album and scenes at the cemetery.

Despite the fact that there was a lot of action to shoot between cooking classes, harvesting olive trees and processing oil at the mill, I wanted to go beyond the Fontanaro property to gather supporting footage. First, I took advantage of the hilly landscape of Umbria to get establishing shots of the property at the golden evening hour. I traveled to a hill opposing the property to capture a panorama from a higher elevation. Also, I accompanied Alina to local supermarkets to see what olive oils they sell as extra virgin and how they are labeled. I refrained from using a tripod in the supermarkets because I did not want to attract attention to myself. Although not using a tripod resulted in unsteady footage, I thought it fit the unsettling mood of falsely labeled extra virgin olive oil in Italian supermarkets.

I had also planned to travel to interview author Tom Mueller after his return to Italy from Washington D.C. However, even though I confirmed the date of his return and my plan to interview him thereafter, he emailed me that he was not available for the interview. Although my plans fell through and I thought Mueller's interview was necessary to my project, I immediately sought alternatives. I had a pre-departure, recorded Skype interview with Mueller that I would use in my narrative. Also, I discussed with Alina and Lucia the possibility of interviewing a local expert on Italian extra virgin olive oil and they were willing to go through their personal contacts.

Finally, on the last day of shooting, Lucia arranged an interview with Saverio Pandolfi, a member of Slow Food in Umbria and researcher at the National Research Council of Italy. I found this interview the most difficult part of my week. Not only was Pandolfi the least fluent in English, but he also talked in very scientific terms. Further, Lucia was present to facilitate and translate parts of the interview, which was helpful but also interfered with the clarity of Pandolfi's responses.

After shooting interviews and the events of each day, I developed a routine to prepare for the next day and to stay on top of my work. Every evening I uploaded, organized and backed-up my files; charged the batteries for my equipment; and planned out my coverage of the next day.

This helped me to review what I shot and to make lists of scenes that I thought were missing in my coverage. It also helped me to make sure I did not lose track of any equipment, which made returning to America with all equipment in good shape possible.

Gathering B-Roll and Interviews in Maryland

To complete my filming, I visited the only store in America that sells Fontanaro's extra virgin olive oil, Cleo's Fine Oils and Vinegars in Annapolis, Maryland. My approach here was to capture the American perception and experience of tasting fine oils.

Knowing how my story was evolving since my return from Italy, I arrived to the store with a mental checklist of the shots and sounds I hoped to gather. Some of the items on my list included an interview with the co-owner, Saleta. I also planned to capture reactions to extra virgin olive oil tasting, the arrangement of the store's products, the appearance of the store from inside and out and the sounds of preparing a bottle of oil for sale.

The biggest challenges I faced during this part of my work were related to business that particular day. Sunday, according to the employees of Cleo's, is a slower day in business. As it turned out, there were still influxes of customers, but they seemed to me to be at inconvenient times. For example, I started conducting my interview with Saleta when no customers were in the store. Then, about halfway through the interview, a large group of customers arrived. Although this contributed to audio that was not as clean as I had predicted, it allowed me to capture Saleta's interactions with one of the customers.

Another example of the inconvenience of the timing of customers was related to my schedule for the day. I had arranged to meet Sharon Simon, a customer of Fontanaro extra virgin olive oil, at her home at two in the afternoon. However, the best opportunity to capture a variety of customers in the store while they sampled oils was fifteen minutes before I was to be at her home. My solution was to sacrifice being punctual for the shots I intended to gather. So I

documented the most animated customers while they tasted the oil, then quickly packed my gear and headed to my next destination.

Following my visit to the store, I finished documenting the production-to-consumption process of Fontanaro extra virgin olive oil. Meeting Sharon Simon and her family for the first time, I made it clear my role as a human-journalist: I first carried on conversation with the family about my experiences in Italy and then set up my camera and audio equipment. Doing so not only allowed them to feel more comfortable with my presence, but it also gave them an understanding of the goal of my work.

In retrospect, I successfully gathered visual and audible material of the family's use of and appreciation for Fontanaro extra virgin olive oil. My interview with the Sharon was effective in that the window light was pleasing and she was open to sharing anecdotes about the oil and her children. While she was cooking, I was able to capture multiple uses of the oil as well as details in the kitchen that contributed to the American side of the story. For example, pictures of the children on the refrigerator, the daughter asking about the Ravens football team, and the children arguing about washing their hands before touching food are details typical in American culture.

However, one obstacle I faced was that the parents seemed at times more interested in asking questions about my project than the food they were preparing or eating. This problem was a result of not having met the family prior to my visit. Although this detracted from the family's natural behaviors, it increased their comfort level with my presence in their home.

Reflections and conclusions

Just as the flight to Italy and the hour drive to Maryland served as a time to think, the flight westward across the Atlantic and northward from Annapolis allowed me to reflect on my achievements, shortcomings and overall experience at Fontanaro, Cleo's and Sharon's home.

Overall, I thought my filming was a success because I returned with what I considered a

collection of quality footage to create the multimedia video. The subjects of my work had been open and, for the most part, at ease with my presence. The interviewees of the story also avidly supported the goal of my project. Their lifestyles and location provided for great visual opportunities as well as fairly clean audio during interviews. Finally, the weather was generally pleasing to my wishes and the well being of the equipment.

I reflected on the shortcomings of my time at Fontanaro Organic Farm Houses during the plane ride, too. The biggest regret I returned to America with was not having interviewed Tom Mueller. However, I understood that finding an alternative expert to interview was the best solution given my circumstances.

I also determined that with better Italian language skills I could have more successfully completed my work. For example, rather than trying to guess what the Pinelli family was talking about when they spoke in Italian, I could have comprehended their conversations more fully. This would have helped me plan what events were most important to capture when things were occurring simultaneously among the kitchen, the mill and the grove. Also, with more advanced linguistics, I would have been able to better carry on casual conversation with the workers between filming so they felt more comfortable with my presence. Lastly, improved skills in Italian would have helped me communicate more effectively my intentions for my project to the Pinelli family. Although they seemed to understand the purpose of my work, at times my intentions to capture actions in their most natural state were not always clear.

From my achievements and shortcomings, I put together a mental list of lessons learned from my experience in Italy. The most important lesson I learned is that an in-depth story is challenging. It demands passion and lasting commitment. Since an in-depth story is not like a daily news assignment, it requires that the journalist is truly interested in the subject. In my case, Italian food culture is one of my passions. Not only did this make it easy for me to stay interested in my subject while I filmed for a week in Italy and a day in Maryland, but it also made the

experience enjoyable and fulfilling. At times, I became exhausted from filming one subject for several days. But, I realized I was able to devote my complete attention to my work because I was not balancing it with other assignments and schoolwork. I was away from the college scene and working independently. Therefore, I believe the success of my work resulted from my passion for the subject and from devoting a week solely to filming.

Another important lesson I learned is that international coverage is challenging. While a journalist should be committed to gathering an excessive amount of material to ensure a smooth editing process, he or she must also know when it is appropriate to take up the human role. I learned there must be a balance between shooting a culture-centered story and showing respect by participating in that culture without a camera. For example, mealtimes are a major part of Italian culture. When I was filming a family dinner one night, I was cut short on my work because the family expected me to join them at the table. So I asked permission to shoot for a few more minutes, and then accompanied them at dinner.

Not only did stepping away from my camera help me show respect to both Italian and American families and their culture, but it also allowed me to refresh my vision before filming more. At other times when I stepped away from the camera, I learned more about the families I was documenting, which then allowed and inspired me to capture those aspects through the camera as I had witnessed them initially. Without thoughts about ISO and white balance, I could focus on aspects of the story that I had not yet filmed and then return to my camera to capture those parts with a fresh set of eyes. Overall, I think success in an in-depth story and international coverage results from keeping your vision fresh, your mind open and your interest in the subject strong.

Chapter 4

Post-Production

The editing process is comprised mainly of distilling and rearranging footage. Although the process of filtering through hours of footage may be overwhelming, it is the most effective way to guarantee the best footage will appear in the final video.

I began my post-production work by first backing up all footage on an external hard drive. Then, I organized my footage into folders based on subject matter. For example, I created a folder for interviews as well as folders for each of the following: harvest, transport, press, filter, bottle, consume, scene setters, Cleo's store and Sharon's home.

With all the footage categorized, I then created a sequence for each in Adobe Premiere. This involved importing every video from that category's folder and pulling from those clips the best moments, whether they were a key movement, a telling detail of a scene or an important sound transition. Then, within each category's sequence I arranged the clips, aiming to establish a non-stop sequence of that subject matter with smooth visual and audible transitions. Condensing each sequence down to the best possible visual and audible clips, I think, allowed me to gradually proceed in the editing process and to adhere to the quality of video I hoped to produce.

Meanwhile, I created a sequence devoted to interview narratives. After transcribing the seven interviews I gathered between Italy and Maryland, I was able to construct a written narrative to use as the foundation for my final video. Working from a typed representation of the interviews allowed me to evaluate more cohesively the narrative I was creating. In other words, before working with the video interviews in Adobe Premiere, I established a clear narrative that I could read and edit as if it were a print article. This more precise editing technique for the

narrative allowed me to recognize repetition, awkward transitions and overall clarity that may be easily missed in video form.

Once I had a transcription of the narrative for the video, I then placed the corresponding video clips into the interview sequence. From this arrangement, I edited the narrative based on the fact that what might “sound” good in type does not always sound appealing in video. Finally, with a more solid narrative in video form, I was able to imagine what categorical sequences would correspond to various sections of the interview sequence.

The next step in my editing workflow involved pulling sequences of each category into the interview sequence so the visuals of each category would cover the visuals of the interviews and the audio of the interviews would propel the story. In the beginning, the sum of the category sequences was much longer in duration than the interview sequence allowed for. Thus, as I pulled in each category sequence, I again filtered that sequence further to only include the most visually and audibly appealing clips.

This part of my editing process involved the most rapid changes to my video. As I pulled each sequence into the main video, I began to create connections between what was being said and what was being shown. Some of those connections became apparent much later in the editing process, however. For example, at first it was unclear how I would most logically incorporate the various scenes of consumption. Then, after arranging and rearranging those scenes several times, I saw a connection between the different lighting situations at each meal and used that to depict the passing of a day between meals.

Once I had established a rough edit of the video combining parts of every category sequence, I created textual components. These included title slides, lower thirds to identify the seven characters introduced audibly in the story, subtitles translating from Italian a section of an interview, and closing credits.

At this point, I had all the elements I envisioned necessary for my final video: an interesting and informative sequence of visuals that would take the viewer between Italy and America; a clear, well-paced and equally informative narrative told by both Italian- and English-speaking characters; audio elements that maintain the pace of the narrative as well as enhance the overall video experience; and indicators of names and locations in lower thirds.

Although these elements were all featured in my video, I was not confident yet in its completeness. After several consecutive days of editing the video, I was too accustomed to the sequences to recognize possible changes that would improve the quality of my video. So I abandoned the editing process for a few days and returned to it with a fresher vision of what I would amend. Additionally, prior to further editing I saw value in gathering viewer opinions. I showed each edit of my video to faculty, friends and family members to determine what was not clear to them, what they thought was missing from the story, and what other improvements they wished to see.

Returning to the video, I had several suggestions from viewers as well as my own formulated critique. Some of the changes I made to my video involved adjusting levels of natural sound, condensing sequences that failed to drive the story, and increasing the pace of the video with a collage of repeated spoken words and visuals related to olive oil production and consumption. This version was a fairly linear representation of the production-to-consumption process of extra virgin olive oil.

Other changes suggested to me required more time and thought. For example, after sharing my video with Maisie Crow, a documentary photographer and filmmaker based in New York, I made the most significant changes to my work. I rearranged my video from the linear story I had to one that followed a less direct path from consumption to production, and I opened the video with a central character. This new version exposed Sharon Simon first so viewers could connect with her as the consumer and determine why they should care about truth in extra virgin

olive oil. This rearranging reduced the duration of my video by more than four minutes, increasing its overall effectiveness.

I believe the most effective way to produce such a long-term project includes a lot of give and take. My approach to editing may not always be comprehended by all viewers. So it is important to gather feedback and apply it in terms of my own style. Further, devoting several months to editing a multimedia video allows for necessary changes to develop and to transpire without deadline pressure. As I have noticed previously with shorter-term assignments, a lot can change in one's opinion of a work in a matter of days. The opportunity to act on those changing opinions does not come with short-term assignments, but rather with projects such as "What's In Your Bottle?" In my opinion, video editing is a process that cannot be rushed if one aspires for a high level of quality. That is not to say that projects completed under deadline pressure are of lower quality. Nevertheless, I conclude that my post-production process follows the medieval French phrase, which coincidentally shares the same locale of my project: "Rome wasn't built in a day."

Appendix A

Video Transcription

Sharon

We started becoming more aware of the differences in kinds of oils and I think, you know, before I was probably just using regular oil, I don't even know what it was.

Even my children recognize the difference.

Sofia, she's thirteen, and Max is ten.

They didn't have an "aha" experience when they first tasted it, but they definitely know when it's not in their food.

As an example, I had bought a supermarket olive oil because we had run out of some of Cleo's products. And my son especially, he couldn't even eat it. He said, "This is terrible. I don't want this."

So they notice when it's something other than a superior olive oil that's being used in their food.

Lucia

Our oil is only at Cleo's at the moment.

Saleta

These other stores, you just don't know. You're choosing off the shelf a bottle that's been on the shelf how long.

Alina

Ninety percent of the people prefer to spend five euro, or five dollars, for a liter of olive oil.

Tom

If you want to buy cheap, smelly, rancid oil, go for it. But I think the label should indicate you're not buying first quality.

Lucia

What is important is the quality, more than the quantity.

Alina

When you go to the supermarket, you can see a lot of numbers of olive oils.

And when I travel in the U.S. I see a lot of olive oil that here doesn't exist.

Saleta

It's a product of there just really not being a regulation of olive oil in the United States.

Tom

It's kind of the used cars sales of the food industry right now. Unfortunately, labels don't tell the whole story.

Tom

Extra virgin olive oil

Sharon

Olive oil.

Saverio

Extra virgin olive oil.

Lucia

Olive oil.

Saleta

Extra virgin olive oil.

Alina & Giovanni

Extra virgin olive oil.

Saleta

That's as fresh as you can get.

Sharon

Any other kind of oil is just bland and just tastes greasy.

Saverio

If you take the same quantity of fat from animal and from olive tree.

Translated: I'm 58 years old. I eat about 22 kilos (49 pounds) of olive products a year. And I'm not very fat. Right? If I were to eat 22 kilos (49 pounds) of bad fat, I would probably have a stomach like this.

Sharon

I don't even know the last time I've gone through an entire stick of butter, like we just don't even use it anymore. It's olive oil all the way.

Lucia

And it's so nice for us to get them understand the difference between an olive oil and other, which is not of all Italian as well because most of Italian they don't know anything. If they don't produce oil and they are not accustomed to use the right oil. Maybe they buy in shelf oil that has no taste and they think that that's okay.

Giovanni

We press the olives after six hour from the harvest.

Lucia

That is what make our oil so different from the other.

Giovanni

It's something that a lot of other farm or industry doesn't do. For example, the big producer of olive oils, also in Italy, maybe could buy the olives from other countries like Greece, like Spain, like north of Africa and press in Tuscany the olives.

Alina

Everybody is fascinated by “made in Tuscany” but it’s not possible for us to produce and sell all the olive oil that we see all over the world.

Lucia

We are not big, but I think that little drops will make the ocean so maybe we will achieve what we dream: more knowledge and more responsibility by all the producer.

Saleta

And they’re learning.

Sharon

You know, learning about anything new, it’s finding magic in something that before was sort of commonplace. It’s almost a magical experience. It really, it’s amazing.

Appendix B

Story for Print Journalism

It was just another Thursday in 1986 for most Italians. But instead of being a normal sip-a-morning-cappuccino, savor-a-two-hour-lunch, Italian kind of *giovedì*, it was the day McDonald's arrived in Rome.

More than 300 miles away from the new set of golden arches near the Spanish Steps, Carlo Petrini saw this as the threatening dawn of fast food culture. So he began organizing the now international **Slow Food** movement.

Today, the Slow Food movement has 100,000 members in more than 150 countries, including **America** and Italy. Rather than directly opposing fast food chains and targeting globalization, Slow Food members promote the preservation of regional food traditions such as extra virgin olive oil - *olio extravergine di oliva*.

Deep roots in Slow Food

Olive oil is known for its deep roots and small producers, which Slow Food advocates hope to protect from industrialization - *industrializzazione*. Historically, olive oil has been cherished for its purity since its first use as a perfume in the Middle East during the third century B.C. Now, it is a global food made by generational family businesses and large companies alike. And, it comes in many types, including the most valuable extra virgin grade.

The **United State Department of Agriculture (USDA)** and the **International Olive Council (IOC)** both distinguish extra virgin olive oil from other, lower quality oils. The extra virgin grade is recognized chemically by its oleic acid - *acido oleico* - content. In order to receive its label, extra virgin olive oil must pass through tests with a free fatty acid content not exceeding 0.8

grams per 100 grams. Further, the law sets sensory requirements. True extra virgin olive oil must be free of defects and have a perceptible level of fruitiness. Even though such standards exist, olive oil regulation is voluntary and the USDA does not police the labeling of extra virgin olive oil.

As a result, olive oil labels - *etichette* - are evermore deceiving. Journalist Tom Mueller believes consumers depend on olive oil price tags more than labels because labels do not provide the information consumers need to make decisions. In fact, [University of California, Davis](#) researchers found that olive oil labels mislead consumers. In July 2010, they released a study proving 73% of “extra virgin” olive oils sold in California supermarkets failed to meet the internationally accepted definition for extra virgin.

“It’s one of those well-kept secrets that as soon as you get into the knowledgeable people in the olive oil community, everyone kind of knows,” Mueller said in a Skype chat. “And many of the people in the olive oil community, good and bad, know exactly where the games are being played.”

The game that Mueller refers to is particularly evident in America where rapidly increasing olive oil consumption exceeds the finite number of honest extra virgin olive oil producers. In order to satisfy consumer demands, industrial producers compromise quality for quantity. They cut extra virgin olive oil with soybean and seed oils and still label it extra virgin to make a more widely available product. Without enforced USDA and IOC regulations, it is possible to label this less valuable product as extra virgin olive oil. Then, consumers buy into it, thinking they are still getting the fresh, highest-quality olive oil while saving money.

Mueller lists several ways consumers can distinguish true extra virgin olive oil from its degraded counterpart on his website, [truthinoliveoil.com](#). The simplest way to know a bottle of extra virgin olive oil is the real stuff is to find a specific place of production - *produzione* - on the label. Second, a harvest date - *data di raccolto* - on the label indicates the freshness required in

the extra virgin grade. Also, the “best by” date should be no less than two years away. Third, authentic extra virgin olive oil is packaged in tinted bottles - *bottiglie* - to prevent oxidation caused by exposure to light. Last, real extra virgin olive oil has bitter, peppery and fruity flavors - *sapori* - that confirm the presence of antioxidants found only in the extra virgin grade.

An invisible problem

Unfortunately, not all consumers understand how to tell the difference between extra virgin and other types of olive oil, let alone that there is a problem sparked by the difference. In fact, Mueller says not even one-third of olive oil consumers understand the problem in buying olive oil that is not the fresh, quality product it claims to be. This is especially worrisome for Slow Food advocates who live by quality. They are nervously witnessing a slow decline in small, local extra virgin olive oil producers as big-name brands attract more consumers with cheap products.

Not only is some extra virgin olive oil falsely labeled, it is also lacking identity - *identità*. Every time mass-produced olive oil passes through a factory, it loses its connection to the land on which its olives grow. French social scientist Claude Fischler addresses this problem of food identification in his article “Food, self and identity.”

“Modern food has become in the eyes of the eater an ‘unidentified edible object,’ devoid of origin or history, with no respectable past-in short, without identity,” Fischler writes. Without identity in their food, consumers cannot establish a sense of themselves because, as Fischler explains, food determines human biological, psychological and social identity.

Truth in a bottle

Among today’s abundance of globalized, non-identifiable food, there still exist some regional products that Slow Food members promote. True extra virgin olive oil is one of those

and it plays a major role in the identity of Italians.

By definition, extra virgin olive oil is a fresh product - *prodotto fresco*. Olives are pressed to obtain their juice the same day of harvest. There is no middleman or long trek involved in processing real extra virgin olive oil. An extra virgin olive oil producer, typically also the farmer and proprietor, ensures the oil is a product of his or her land and hands. It retains characteristics of the soil from which the olives grew and the producer's methods bring to the oil unique traits.

At olive oil tastings, the aroma and flavor of authentic extra virgin olive oil clearly contrast with the bland "extra virgin" olive oils that stock supermarket shelves.

Even though the majority of extra virgin olive oil in American supermarkets fails to meet the definition of true extra virgin olive oil, consumers hungry for the authentic product are not out of luck. Mueller's book [Extra Virginity: The Sublime and Scandalous World of Olive Oil](#) is just the one piece of literature that teaches consumers about globalization and the inner workings of the olive oil industry. Further, online resources, like [truthinoliveoil.com](#), guide American consumers with lists of quality olive oil stores in nearly every state. Many of these listed stores operate websites that share product specifications and producer contact information.

Reclaiming the lost identity of extra virgin olive oil is possible with this accessibility to information about olive oil. Consumers may not have easy access to the site of production, but through online media and retail outlets they can connect with the extra virgin olive oil producer, who is oftentimes eager and willing to share their knowledge.

One of those producers is [Fontanaro Organic Farm Houses](#) in Paciano, Italy. The family-business website accommodates both English and Italian speakers. It hosts a variety of information, from product specifications to biographical and contact information. [Fontanaro.it](#) also features images of the producing family and their land that hosts extra virgin olive oil production.

Further along in the process, Cleo's Fine Oils and Vinegars sells Fontanaro extra virgin olive oil in Annapolis, Maryland. The store's website offers plenty of information so Slow Foodies can connect with quality Italian extra virgin olive oil, its producer and its American retailer.

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