

SEREND!PITY

**50 stories of success
that happened by chance**

by

Oscar Farinetti

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*To my son, Francesco,
the oldest of the three.*

*He is just starting out on a new and
fascinating adventure in terms of work.*

*I have the feeling that he will find himself
involved in many situations where serendipity plays a part.*

*And then, there is the fact that
he is the one who
gave me the idea for this book.*

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Serendipity

The beauty of making a mistake

We make a lot of mistakes, we often take the wrong route. How many times do we look for a lost object only to find another one that we had tried in vain to find just days before? This happens because we are imperfect. But it's not a bad thing.

On the other hand, perfection does not exist and, if it ever existed, it would be boring and would leave us without any stimulation for growth. Imperfection urges us to improve, to improve we need to work hard, by working hard we sometimes make mistakes. Then there is fate, events that take place independent of our will, with which we must live and adapt, perhaps causing us to take new directions.

Sometimes even events occur that change the course of history. Think of that meteorite, about 10 kilometers in diameter, that crashed 66 million years ago near the Yucatán in Mexico. It practically provoked the extinction of the dinosaurs, hitherto undisputed masters of the planet. If that meteor had not hit the earth, we humans would probably not have existed. Or at least we wouldn't be who we are today.

In short, for about three and a half billion years, that is, since life appeared on earth, an immense amount of fatalities, errors and adaptations have produced the result we know today. We say that we humans are the result of a series of imperfections that have met with some success, given that in fact, of all living beings, we have taken command of the planet. At least so it seems, or it seems to us. We got to this point thanks to our inventions: a multitude of discoveries, starting from the fire, all the way up to the Internet.

To invent it is necessary to do research. Sometimes you start in the right direction and you make it, sometimes it happens that you make a mistake and you fail. But there are cases where you take a direction to reach a certain goal and you come across another, perhaps even better than what you expected. Any obvious examples? Christopher Columbus was looking for the Indies and discovered America, penicillin and X-rays were born by mistake, as well as the microwave oven, cellophane, Teflon, dynamite, post-it notes, Viagra, etc., I could go on and on.

In 1754 the English writer Horace Walpole coined a new term, *serendipity*, to define a discovery born by chance, when you were looking for something else. Walpole created this new word based on an ancient Persian fairy tale - probably invented by himself - which tells of three princes, sons of Jafer, king of Serendip (present-day Sri Lanka). The three princes continually traveled the world discovering, always by chance, things they were not looking for.

So it is a term that falls within the family of the words begat by an author and is not brand new, but it carries its 266 years well: it is not widespread, it is hard to pronounce, but every time it

happens it awakens amazement and curiosity in us. In Italian one should say *serendipità* but, although I do not fall into the category of passionate users of English terms, for this book I prefer to use the original word, as it was born. It seems more appropriate to me.

The word *serendipity* was born to define important discoveries that happened by chance, while we were looking for something else, but over time its application has also expanded to indicate more generally beautiful and good things, discovered in a complex way, with an intriguing history that may hinge on fate. And it is used not only to describe inventions: there are serendipities in love (lose the train, take the next one and find the love of your life), in literature (*"When writing a poem, serendipity is frequent: you aim to conquer the Indies and you find America"*; Andrea Zanzotto), in the movies (examples too numerous to count).

In this book I want to talk about the great serendipities that concern my job: that of food. I have been dealing with food and wine for almost twenty years now, but as an amateur those years would be more than double. Studying stories of food, I have come across extraordinary serendipities. A good part of what I tell you are conventional, in the sense that these are very successful and well-known dishes or drinks, literally born by mistake, such as Coca-Cola or gorgonzola. Others concern very good things that were produced simply when someone was trying to correct an error, something forgotten or even a misfortune, such as panettone, Russian salad, or Guinness. Still other stories refer to dishes, raw materials or beverages whose origin is so wild and untamed- such as hot pepper, Barolo or Milanese risotto - that it deserves to be told in detail. Finally, I tell you three stories of serendipity that do not concern food but are so interesting and curious that they intrigued me. In the end, all of these tales are about things that we put in our mouths, such as the Tuscan cigar and Viagra, or that contribute to creating products to put in the mouth, such as *verderame*.

I should divulge that while writing these stories, it occurred to me that there is an "absolute" serendipity, the most important one of all. So, I decided to include it, asking for assistance from a formidable scientist, but I won't tell you what it is. You will find it right in the center of the book, and if you wish you can go and search for it right now. It is a story that is much longer than the others, but I feel that it is worthwhile, however, in the end you will be the judge.

For each of these 50 stories I have chosen to talk to people who know far more than I do about the individual inventions. Producers, gastronomes, cooks, pastry chefs, artists, scientists: a variety of humanity which, in my opinion, provides a decisive addition of value to this humble book. This is believed by someone who meets individuals with much greater talents than himself every day of his life, and who tries to learn from them as much as he can. Enjoy!

Oscar Farinetti

Post scriptum: I suggest to all of you who are food and drink lovers to taste the various foods and beverages as you are reading about them. You will enjoy everything twice as much when you know in deeper detail about what you are tasting. I have tried this with my friends and trust me, it works!

5!

Il Barolo

(page 34)

“Call me Crazy”

with Carlo Petrini

It is dawn on Friday, October 22, 1841.

The *Des Geneys*, a sailing frigate of the Royal Navy, is sailing from Genoa under the command of the Captain of Vascello, Giorgio Mameli. The destination is Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

In the load there are 141 barrels of red wine from 1840, plus and almost that many from '38. This is the wine produced in the cellars of the Tenuta Reale of Pollenzo, derived from Nebbiolo grapes from Roddi, Verduno, Santa Vittoria d'Alba and Serralunga. But it is not for sale: on the shipping note it says, “Sample shipment for America”.

That wine, in fact, after crossing the Atlantic, after facing the ocean waves and the impervious perturbations of winter, after having undergone the thermal shock of crossing the equator, after staying two years in Brazil (with tastings, of course), that wine should have returned to Genoa and from there again to the Estate of King Carlo Alberto, halfway between Bra and Alba, right back to the cellar that had produced it. In practice, it was an experiment.

And so, in the winter of 1843, the *Des Geneys* returned to the Ligurian port with the same barrels with which it had left.

“The wine from Pollenzo returned from America not only unscathed, but also greatly improved ... Here in a nutshell all the secret by which we reach the sure way of making our wines undertake long journeys without their detriment: and here even then the discredit was removed, which for centuries has disheartened our wine compared to many others that come from abroad. Piedmont is capable of undertaking it, capable of transporting it from one pole to another on earth, without the wine suffering any harmful alteration.”

This is what General Paolo Francesco Staglieno, creator of the trip wrote in his notes.

It is he who reopened those barrels and, as you can imagine, exulted. It is he who prepared that Nebbiolo wine by adding, it seems, a little Barbera. It is he who innovated it, through two operations that he considered essential for durability: adding sulphites and clarifying.

General Staglieno, by virtue of the military and political traditions of his noble Genoese family, had completed his military career and had been the commander of the Fort of Bard in the Aosta Valley.

However, his natural inclination, what today would be elegantly called his “daemon”, was dealing with wine: not only as an amateur, because Staglieno enjoyed producing wine too, and, above all, innovating it. He was a winemaker before his time, even before schools existed and even before this word took on meaning it has today.

After the result of the experiment on the *Des Geneys*, however, Carlo Alberto had no doubts: he entrusted him with the Tenuta Reale of Pollenzo that he had bought, and equipped, precisely in order to do research and improve the products of Piedmontese agriculture, in particular, wine. And Staglieno did not disappoint him. The power and determination in his words is disarming: *“You may say that I am crazy, as many others have said, that I want to straighten the crooked leg with my pretense to change the winemaking method in Piedmont, which his Royal Majesty allowed me to exercise my method of winemaking in its particular heritage and that, even if I ruined all the wine, you must be patient and allow me to do it.”*

Nebbiolo, according to the General, must have been very different from that normally produced in those days in the territories around Barolo. The Langhe wine, until the mid-nineteenth century, was sweet, cloudy and sparkling. Staglieno wanted it *“dry, limpid, transparent, and also generous, alcoholic, and pleasant on the palate with an exquisite and healthy body, which retains a fragrant aroma. At this point you can send this wine to the most distant countries and it will have nothing to envy to the Bordeaux and Burgundies.”*

He had imagined, with that wonderful Nebbiolo grape available, to be able to create a wine that had more or less the characteristics that today make Barolo one of the most esteemed reds in the world. He studied, experimented and revolutionized wine to achieve this goal.

General Paolo Francesco Staglieno is probably the person to whom we owe the most with regards to the overwhelming success of Barolo, now known almost all over the world. Probably, if he had not accomplished the extravagant undertaking of sending and returning those 141 barrels to the other side of the planet, Barolo would be another wine today, perhaps less attractive. That General is not remembered enough, in my opinion, for the good that he produced for all of us from the Langhe region, and for Italians in general.

Now let's move on to Barolo.

Juliette Colbert, great-granddaughter of that Colbert who had been finance minister of the Sun King, arrived in Barolo in marriage to Count Falletti, the main owner of vineyards, as well as of a magnificent Barolo castle with an attached cellar. Juliette came from the Loire, a region of France where they knew how to make great wines. After tasting the nebbiolo produced in Barolo, she decided that with those grapes one could do better. She hired one of the greatest French winemakers and wine merchants: Louis Oudart, a great friend of hers, who already worked with

Camillo Benso Conte di Cavour. With her compatriot, the Countess implemented a series of innovative processes, both in the fields and in the cellar, aimed at improving wine.

And it is in 1845 that the countess Colbert Falletti made the most sensational move: 325 wagons (one for each day of the year, excluding Lent), pulled by 600 oxen, leave from Barolo for Turin. Destination: The Royal Palace. A barrel of red wine was tied to each wagon, with the aim of convincing the court, but also the media of the time, that the wine produced in Barolo was the “Wine of the Kings and the King of wines.”

A cunning marketing plan? We can say so, and it was effective: it resulted in numerous descriptions of the epic journey in documents and newspapers, including international ones, of the time.

Brava *Giulia!* (as they called her in Barolo) This is how certain things must be done in the world. I told you about two special people who contributed, with their forward-looking ideas, to the success of a wine that now, after one hundred and fifty years, is found on the best dining tables on the planet. Without the two of them, Barolo would not be what it is today.

Now I would like to talk about Camillo Benso Conte di Cavour, Emanuele Alberto di Mirafiore, Giacomo Borgogno, and the cellars of Bra, but I don't have enough time.

Instead, I would like to give space to a contemporary man: Carlin Petrini.

He is not only the founder of Slow Food, he is not only the creator of the University of Gastronomic Sciences of Pollenzo (yes, the same place where Staglieno used to make wine), Carlo is also, after the Narzole disaster in 1986, the disaster in which 23 people died of methanol poisoning, foremost among those who worked the most and in the best possible way to restore quality and dynamic energy to the wines of the Langhe.

Yet today, decades later, we are perhaps once again faced with the need for change and innovation.

“That there is a need for this now is clear to everyone,” confirms Carlo, “not only in the world of wine, but in the entire food system. It's the soil that asking it of us.” Carlin, father of the Slow Food philosophy, tells me how the loss of biodiversity and fertility of the earth testifies to its urgency. The ongoing climate crisis forces us to ask ourselves questions and give us immediate answers. And the answer can only be one. “The productivist approach, which only focuses on maximizing profit, must be abandoned in favor of agriculture that primarily looks at the protection of ecosystems and people.”

It seems easy to say, but to do implement these ideas is much more complicated. However, for this, Carlo seems to have cut a path right through the forest of the improbabilities and obstacles of our time. It is from an important world, such as that of wine and in particular the reality linked to Barolo, that the revolutionary engine such as the one that is now needed, can begin.

“A world so relevant, for the positioning it has had and which it still maintains in the market and in people’s hearts, has a great responsibility. To respect the story of which it is the bearer, and to honor the visionary characters you have talked about,” he pauses as if he were to honor them all for a moment, “we must ensure that Barolo continues to be not only ‘the Wine of the Kings and the King of wines’ but also and above all a promoter of change.”

“So, you believe that we are facing a ‘year of new beginnings’ in the Langhe? That the choices we will make in these years will have a strong impact on the times ahead?” Carlo nods.

This is the real challenge of our time: inspired by the courage and perseverance of General Staglieno, inspired by the creativity and visionary nature of Countess Colbert, today’s winemakers and winemakers have, and should feel, the moral obligation to free Barolo from chemistry indefinitely. “Respect for the vineyard, respect for grapes, and in general, respect for the Langhe territory. To be able to deliver it intact and genuine to future generations, this is what is needed most.”

It is the great utopia of organic cultivation, that which prohibits the use of herbicides and synthetic fertilizers, which becomes mandatory. And many winemakers are already trying. Yet, as Carlo also says, it would be nice if it were the Protection Consortium itself that asked that Barolo should be born only where chemistry has been banned. Of course, the first organic denomination in the world could seem as if it were a marketing operation, but - as Giulia or Juliette teaches us, you see - when a product is good and pure, solid communication becomes fundamental to make it known to everyone, so that it may become an example and a driving force for others.

But it doesn’t end here. There is another challenge that my friend hopes producers will take to heart, and that is, the defense of biodiversity. They will play a key role in not seeing it die.

“Once upon a time in the Langhe region eight million bottles of Barolo were produced, today we have reached fourteen million. The producers should have what I call *a sense of limits*, giving space not only to Nebbiolo monocultures but to other historical varieties of grapes in the area, such as Dolcetto, which is increasingly forgotten. After all, without its autochthonous vines and its biodiversity, the Langhe region would no longer have reason to exist, and Barolo would be one of the first things to suffer.”

As always, this man sees things before others do. I feel a bit like his ally in this vision of our future that could become reality in a few years, all one has to do is to really want it to happen. I would add that all of the Langhe’s agricultural vehicles should run on bio-methane, perhaps self-produced, since each farm would have the potential to do so. As soon as I think about it, with my mind wandering about faraway places, possible futures, I imagine how much we could increase sales and the average price, if only we explained this philosophy well to the world. It

would be the first Consortium which obliges all producers to cultivate without synthetic chemistry, to respect the biodiversity of their territory, and to create circular energy with zero impact. It would be a dream. Carlo smiles at me, although there is a small reproach in his gaze. “Forgive me, Carlo, my ‘productivist spirit’ as you call it, but you know very well that I firmly believe in the possibility of reconciling ethics and the market.” He abandons the expression of disappointment because after all, perhaps he knows me, and perhaps because he has one last thing to say.

“Meanwhile, *dumse da fé Oscar, dumse da fé (let’s get going, Oscar, we’ve got our work cut out for us)*. But, think about it, the feeling that should drive us to this choice is the common good. Never before has the common good been more important than that of each of us.” A wise man: this is what my friend Carlin Petrini is; a visionary who, with belief and tenacity, knows that we can bring our dreams to fruition.

with Katia Deloqu

“A saint!” This is how my wife always describes her when, upon entering Eataly in New York, we see her intent on loading the counter of Italian sweets. Katia Deloqu is our North American Pastry Chef. It is she who supervises the preparation and sale of pastry products in all the Eataly of the United States and Canada, from New York to Boston, from Chicago to Los Angeles, from Las Vegas to Toronto. Her headquarters are in the Big Apple but she is always moving around, spinning like a top, across the continent and now we see her less and less in our store in front of the Flatiron, where everything was born.

However, there is not one single time when we pass in front of the showcase of sweets that my wife does not exclaim: “She is a saint!” and, in fact, everything seems so beautiful, colorful, inviting and so well displayed even when Katia is not there, that it really looks like the consequence of a divine hand.

Not only does she work twenty-five hours a day with an infinite sense of duty, but she is really good, a true master of pastry art. Blessed be Luca Montersino who introduced us to her when, in 2010, we called her to New York to help us open the first Eataly in the United States. The idea was that she would stay a few weeks to do some training for the local pastry chefs, teaching them how to make tiramisu, panna cotta, in Sicilian cannoli, the *pastiera* and everything else. But she never returned to Italy. She is now their leader.

Having to tell the strange story of Brownies, I immediately thought of her and I came across a serendipity inside of a serendipity.

In fact, it not only has to do with the recipe for these sweets, but it is also present in the life of Katia and causes her to discover brownies many years ago, when she was in middle school.

Katia, then little Katia, worked as a babysitter for two children of an English lady, in order to earn a little something extra. My friend’s eyes still light up when she talks about it: “They were called Orso and Rowen, and they were very lively but so cute, Oscar! I will never forget them.”

The mother of these two rascals always prepared some sweets for an afternoon snack and among these there was a chocolate, nut, and coconut cake, very thick and gooey. “It almost felt like eating a bar of chocolate! It was clearly a particular brownie, the taste was indescribable, delicious, I had to control myself in order to leave some for the children. “

“I can imagine! But where is serendipity? “

“It is in the fact that I, the first time I tasted it, I immediately had the desire to make that dessert for myself. And each time this thought grew more and more. In the end I think it is this, or at least also this, that influenced my choice of life. Now I spend my time cooking cakes and, fate wants, I do it in the country of origin of the Brownie! “

Katia has the typical enthusiasm of those who love her work beyond measure. She cares about the research, the well-made and the absolute meticulousness with which you have to deal with pastry. Still, probably also because she also feels she is the daughter of serendipity, she feels a particular fascination for things born by chance: coincidence or error, the fact that an unexpected thing comes to life she finds amazing.

“Nobody had ever thought about it but it is as if it were always been there, ready to be invented, don’t you think? Brownies, for example, are also the result of a sensational mistake.”

It is said, Katia tells me, but it is a common legend for those who work with doughs and creams, that a careless pastry chef in charge of preparing a chocolate cake, forgot to put the yeast in the dough. “First of all, luckily for him he didn’t work here with me! I would have fired him right away and that would have been the end of Brownies!” the pastry chef burst out laughing as she continues to reflect on the fact that, in the end (we can say it quietly, but it’s true) brownies really look like “pieces of an undeveloped cake”, that are very, very good! As a consistency, they can remotely remind us of our *tenerina* or *cuore morbido al cioccolato*.

But here’s the more precise story, with dates and places well fixed on the map. The first appearance of the Brownies on a large scale took place around 1897 in a famous department store called Sears in Chicago.

However, this dessert was born a few years earlier, in the same city but a little further north, in a hotel near Lake Michigan, The Palmer House Hotel. Mrs. Bertha Palmer, the owner of the hotel, asked her pastry chef, to prepare a dessert that was easy to eat in small bites and, above all, without getting your hands dirty. It was 1892 and soon there would be the World Exposition, dedicated to the 400 years of the discovery of America and Miss Palmer wanted all the ladies who came to visit, not to have the thought of running to the bathroom to wash their hands after eating a sweet. The result was the “Palmer House Brownie”, with walnuts and apricot glaze. Even today, after 128 years, the Brownie is served in the same hotel with the original recipe. Unfortunately, the name of the pastry chef is not known, but the hope is that he or she has enjoyed at least a little glory for this delicious creation, and not just a lecture for having forgotten the yeast.

Now in America, wherever one turns, Brownies can be found. Brownies displayed in bakeries, brownies in bags, brownies in supermarkets and cafes. Apparently, no one eats anything else.

“Can it be said to be the national sweet of the United States?” I ask Katia, who nods. Of course, yes! It is the most popular dessert in the USA and, as she explains, there are so many variations that one that one likes can always be found.

The first written recipe appeared in 1896 in the *Boston Cooking School Cookbook* and in 1907 new alternative versions began to be published, such as the one called the Bangor Brownie, much denser and chocolaty, which includes the name of Bangor, the city in Maine where it was created. The Blondie, the vanilla version, is also ancient, but many other versions have been born since then. They can be served with the addition of whipped cream, powdered sugar, different types of sugars and chocolate, although the most common way to enjoy them, here in America, is with milk for a snack.

If it were time, I really think I would eat one, too. Yet a little, all its success, all its goodness worries me a little bit: “For some time now I have found many here also in Italy. We already have Pubs instead of taverns, Halloween instead of Carnival, isn’t it that we will all find ourselves eating Brownies instead of *cannoli*, *canestrelli*, *crumiri*, *la pastiera*, *bonet* and *tiramisu*?”

Katia, as if she had read my mind, has the answer ready, which is both convincing and rational.

“You see, Oscar, the worldwide success of this dessert is certainly due to the simplicity of its production and the variety of ingredients that can be added to your taste. In the post-war years, like so many other American things, the Brownie made its first appearance in Italy. You are right when you say that there are more and more of them here, too, but it is normal, it is called globalization. On the other hand, here in America, typical Italian sweets are very popular. And we have done our part.” She winks at me. “I am one of those people who thinks that rather than being on the defense, we should play on offense. And we have great things to present, of course!”

She is probably right, better to think of growing and evolving rather than to defend ourselves from the invasion.

Then Katia rips a piece of paper out of a notebook and dictates the recipe aloud as she writes. I follow her, step by step.

“First of all, I’ll give you that basic one, the most popular here in New York.”

Ingredients: 250 gr sugar, 70 gr butter, 2 eggs and 1 yolk, 75 gr cocoa powder, 75 gr extra virgin oil, 65 gr flour, 130 gr chocolate flakes, 20 gr corn starch, 5 gr baking soda, 5 gr salt.

Steps: melt the butter, add sugar, then the eggs, oil and cocoa. With the spatula, add the flour and finally the chocolate flakes. Bake for 30 minutes at 180 degrees in the preheated oven.

“This instead is the original recipe from 1892 at the Palmer House Hotel:”

Ingredients: 14 oz chocolate (400 gr), 1 lb butter (450 gr), 12 oz sugar (340 gr), 4 oz flour (120 gr), 8 eggs, 12 oz chopped walnuts (120 gr), vanilla extract.

Steps: melt the butter and chocolate, separately mix sugar and flour, add to the mix of chocolate and butter, mix well and then add the eggs, pour into the pan and sprinkle with the chopped walnuts, cook at 180 degrees for 30/40 min. Finally brush the apricot jelly on the surface.

“But which one do you prefer of the two?” Katia lets out a sly smile: “I prefer the third version!”

So, she leaves me the last, definitive, his most successful Brownie recipe. There is always a hint of nostalgia when she talks about what she loves most, and here all the memories shine from Piedmont hazelnuts. “In the end, Piedmont is where I learned my trade.”

Here is Katia Deloqu’s Brownie recipe:

Ingredients: butter 200 g, baking 5 g, cocoa 30 g, eggs 4, chocolate chips 320 g, flour 150 g, brown sugar 200 g, coarsely chopped hazelnuts 120 g.

Steps: beat the eggs with the sugar (just to melt the sugar but it is not necessary to whip them a lot) and add the melted chocolate with the butter, then add all the powders and finally the chopped toasted hazelnuts with a spatula. Bake at 180 degrees for 30 min.

But the interesting thing is that really, and an expert assures me, any ingredient you want to add there is no problem. Just don’t overcook it. It must be a little dry, but only in the corners, and nice soft throughout the rest of the pan.

Everyone has the right to experiment, to try and try again without ever having to throw away his or her creations. It is a great advantage, especially against waste. Katia has also tried thousands of them over time, and during long sessions in the kitchen, she tried to recreate the coconut and walnut one of the English lady who had hired her as a babysitter.

The result? She was never able to recreate it. “Desserts are not made only of ingredients, but of love, of emotions and memories of certain moments. But I don’t give up, Oscar, I will keep trying. Sometimes I think of the English lady. I would like to thank her because it is precisely because of her Brownies that I am here now, in this city at the center of the world, doing this job.”

What did I tell you? Nostalgia, the past, everything that happens in life then comes back to us in a dish, in a still slightly warm pan, full of scents and flavors that remind you of the reason why you can finally feel like you are exactly where you should be.

At the End

(page 291)

“Happy Serendipity!”

Here we are at the end. We have had a great trip around the world: from Torino to Naples, from Milan to Buenos Aires, from Mexico to New York, from Chicago to San Diego, from Trinidad to Paris, from London to Mongolia, to Japan. We have traveled between different eras, from the discovery of fire to modern medicine. We got to know the stories of extraordinary people and chatted with really special types.

I hope that by reading these stories you enjoyed yourself as much as I have in telling you. My hope comes from the fact that you too are probably curious about food and have a certain love for it. Now we know much more about certain foods that we eat and drink. And there is no doubt that this will help us enjoy them more.

I think it has been worth it if only for this reason. We are talking about the only thing that we ‘consume’ or purchase, that enters our body. Therefore, by knowing its history, knowing how it came about and how it is produced, is important.

However, I think the task of a book can and should be something even higher. I believe that a book, which is a novel rather than an essay, has the duty to transmit values that, having become memorable in us, help us improve our behavior. I am convinced that in each of these stories good teachings can be found, through the example of people who, in the most disparate historical moments and on the occasion of small or large difficulties, have found solutions, have managed to do it through passion, perseverance, and bravery.

I have tried, in each of these 50 serendipities (which in the end are 51), to insert a theme ... which goes beyond a mere historical reconstruction. I hope you have noticed my attempt not to tell only stories about objects, but, also and above all, stories about people, special people who have done and created very good things in their lives.

I have always maintained that the easiest, fastest, but also the smartest way to improve any part of one’s life is to learn from the Best. I wrote *Best* in capital letters, because they deserve it; these are people who have laid out a very good project in life, and then have done everything humanly possible to carry it forward in the best way possible.

Now I should start to mention a few, among those who helped me write this book, perhaps starting from the most famous. But it would not be fair, because I would forget many of them, many who are equally important to me. So, in saying goodbye, I will cite the example of one, only one, and this person is not famous at all. And I’m sure the famous will forgive me. Elio

Bottaro, the missionary of the *farinata*, from the Val Varenna near Genoa, has taught us that it is difficult to be simple. But also, that, once achieved, simplicity is an extraordinary value. He has taught us that, through passion and perseverance, we can restore luster to a simple product, we can revive a valley inhabited by simple people, we can restore a strong sense to the life of simple pensioners, linked by a project of volunteering which, in its simplicity, was not easy to complete. Elio taught us, in my opinion, the very high value of simplicity.

I would like to add that the most important lesson that this collection of 50 stories may have given us is the superiority of the value of doubt as compared to certainty. We learned that, thanks to doubt, many “wrong” products have become gastronomic delicacies. The ability to change direction, to go back, to learn from mistakes, to be absolutely not sure that you are right, to never be completely sure that one thing is right and the other is wrong. Having doubts does not mean being uncertain, on the contrary. It is precisely doubt that can lead us not to give up, changing our mind and leading us in the search for a new way.

I would like to close with a wish. I hope that one day, in the not too distant future, we will find ourselves analyzing the tragedy of the Coronavirus pandemic as a kind of *serendipity*. Certainly, it cannot be for those whom we have lost, and for their relatives: these people are the real victims and those of us who have managed to escape its ravages owe to them our first and most heartfelt wish. As I write this, it is early April in 2020, the prevailing current of thought is that the path to recovery from this virus will be in fact very slow and painful. The lack of knowledge about the life cycle of Covid-19 and the seemingly infinite amount of time that the economy stands still, the jobs that have disappeared, but also the days of school and the cultural events that also were not to be, not to mention the very strong lack of human relationships that we are feeling deeply: in the end, all of these factors which lead us toward a strong sense of disorientation make the thesis of a slow and painful return to life absolutely understandable.

But: what if we were faced with a powerful renaissance, both in terms of economic and cultural and values, one that aimed at an advancement of solidarity, respect and sustainability? What if we all found ourselves to be a little better off afterwards? Ready to live our respective roles on this planet in a more responsible way? Well, it would be an unexpected wonder: a truly great *serendipity*. There have been historical periods, following terrible epidemics in the past, which can demonstrate the validity of this utopic belief. Right now, only time will tell, and perhaps by the time you read these lines our future will appear even clearer and more certain to you. In any case, I beg you all to allow me to continue to believe that hope is always worthwhile.

Have a good life! I wish you excellent moments of *serendipity* along the way, in the great and human story to be found in each one of you.