

THE LEGEND OF THE GREAT POLENTA FEED —A Tyrolian Folk Story—

Aug 28, 2022

You should all know that the Trentini of the Alto Adige region of Northern Italy were hard-working people—good-humored and kind. But they had one great fault: **THEY WERE ALWAYS HUNGRY!**

One day, all the Trentinis from most of the Valleys met in the general assembly of the Commune to address this problem.

“Something must be done about this constant hunger,” cried Grant Rauzi, one of the elder spokesmen from Cloz. “If I miss even one meal during the day,” he explained, “I become angry and cranky with my good wife and children.”

Next, it was Johnny Vizzare, a jovial spokesman from Val d’ Non who stood up and crowed: “I too have this curse! Why, if I don’t get extra gnocchi and bread between meals, I can barely stay on my feet, or harvest my apples, or milk my cow.”

Finally, it was Dan Kalstad, an elder spokesman from the village of Dombel, who spoke up. “I too am at the end of my rope, trying to get by on just three meals a day,” he grouched. “Last Sunday I even missed mass because I had to stay home and have a second breakfast.”

“Yes, this is an impossible situation!” shouted all the Trentini at once, “and we need our Mayor to find an answer to the problem!”

Mayor Moser’s Clever Plan

“Hmm,” thought the Mayor whose name was Mary Beth Moser, “I fear my Trentini friends and neighbors have forgotten their roots and are becoming spoiled.”

Now you should know that Mayor Moser was from Val d’ Sole, and her wisdom and good heart were renowned in every village throughout the Dolomites. The Trentinis were very proud to have a mayor like her...and they waited breathlessly that day to hear her guidance.

“Listen to me, one and all,” she finally said. “After careful consideration I can think of only one remedy for such a complicated situation.”

At this point the Trentinis were hanging on the Mayor’s every word....

“I decree,” my friends, “that on August 28, we will all come back together for a giant polenta feed, and we shall eat and drink our fill from noon to dusk. Yes, my friends, you heard me right—instead of going from meal to meal for the rest of our lives, we are going to eat once and for all. We are going to eat so much that day that we will never have to touch another piece of bread or cheese or torta or polenta for the rest of our days!”

At this, all the Trentinis cheered. “Fabulosa! Splendida! What a wise woman! We should definitely hold on to a Mayor like this! C’mon now, let’s all go back to our villages to plan the last great meal of our lives.”

The Day of the Big Polenta Feast

Before long, the fatal day of the picnic arrived. On the morning of Aug 28, all the Trentinis gathered around the big community well in the center of the square, and each of them arrived with huge baskets full of food.

“Now here is the plan,” announced Mayor Moser after gaining the silence of her fellow citizens. “By pouring polenta flour directly into the well water, we can prepare the biggest polenta ever seen in Alto Adige. After that, we will all eat our fill, once and for all, so we will never have to be bothered with preparing meals or eating again for the rest of our lives.”

Forty big sacks of yellow polenta flour were poured into the well that day, followed by two buckets full of salt. Then the Trentinis chose Grant Rauzi, the elder spokesman and complainer from Cloz. They tied a strong rope round his waist and lowered him down into the well with a large wooden glava in his hand so he could stir the polenta. They waited a long time for Grant to yell up to them that the polenta was stiff and ready, but although they shouted down the well several times, no one ever replied.

Then they lowered Johnny Vizzare, the jovial complainer from Val d Non, down into the well and waited for him to yell some good news up to them, but again there was no response.

Finally, Dan Kalstad, the elder spokesman and complainer from the village of Dombel, bravely stepped forward to be lowered into the well. But when he too failed to respond from the bottom of the well, a concerned silence fell over the crowd.

Mayor Moser to the Rescue

It was here that Mayor Moser stepped forward with her calm and reassuring voice. “Don’t worry, my friends, I think I know the problem. By now all three of our countrymen have stuffed themselves with so much of our polenta that they can no longer climb out of the well, or even call up to us. Let’s all link arms, now, and go down and pull these rascals out of the well...and hope that they have learned their lesson, once and for all.”

And it turns out that the three grateful complainers DID learn their lesson that day, and all the Trentinis savored a delicious and unforgettable picnic together.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY IS THIS: Thanks to three hungry complainers and one wise lady Mayor, all the Trentini people from all the valleys were reminded that day that the real magic of living together in the foothills of the majestic Dolomite mountains came from always having “not too much and not too little of anything and everything that life had to offer.”

Except, of course for love...and family...and tradition. You could never have too much of those.

(NOTE: This tale was adapted by Dan Zadra from an actual Trentini fable featured in the Winter collection of “The Secret Heart of Trentino”, compiled by Mauro Neri for the Provincia Autonoma Di Trento.)