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CHEESE MATTERS

BY **KRIS LLOYD**

Over the years, so many people have shared interesting, funny or favourite cheese stories with me and I will be sharing a few of these with you in the coming months. I thought it would be entirely appropriate to begin with a great cheese mate and one of Australia's best cheese experts, Will Studd.

Will has worked with artisan cheese makers since establishing specialist food stores in central London in the 1970s. In 1981 he migrated to Melbourne where he has consistently strived to promote a greater understanding of what good cheese is about, as well as championing the cause for cheese made from raw milk – an issue I am also passionate about.

Will's first book, *Chalk and Cheese*, was published in 1999 and its follow-up title, *Cheese Slices*, was published in 2007. Will has been the executive producer and presenter of *Cheese Slices*, a television program conceived in 2002 that explores the world's traditionally made cheeses. It comes as no surprise that when I spoke to Will that he had a swag of wonderful cheese stories to tell.

He recalls being on the Island of Sardinia, Italy, where he met shepherds for the filming of *Cheese Slices* (season four, episode two). The Sardinians are extraordinarily generous with their hospitality, and were completely oblivious to the fact that the film crew were there to do a job. They offered wine to all at some ungodly hour of the morning – apparently a perfectly normal Sardinian gesture. After a very long day with the shepherds, the crew and Will hiked up into the mountains.

They settled in a rustic barn, and were offered pane carasau, a traditional flatbread from Sardinia. This flatbread recipe is very ancient and was developed for shepherds, who would stay far from home for months at a time. Much to Will's despair, cauldrons of goat meat simmered away in the corner, he explained: "As a vego, you can imagine what I was thinking about that: I'll be here for hours watching everyone eating cooked goat and all I've got is this bit of flatbread!" Will's gaze then meandered to the ceiling of the barn, where clusters of odd-looking bags were hanging. The bags were stuffed fit to burst, the casing stretched to the point of transparency. On closer inspection he realised the bags are indeed goat stomachs, full of semi-dried curd cheese.

One of the shepherds offered to take a bag down, to place it in front of Will. Resembling

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a chrysalis for the pupae of butterflies more than something one would consider eating, the shepherd split the stiff outer casing, exposing the creamy, gooey innards for Will to eat. The shepherd explained they simply take the kid's stomach, fill it with milk and leave it to mature. Will chuckles as he tells me, "All the shepherds were dancing around quite excited, saying it is good for your love life! You know, if ever cheese tastes a bit iffy it is always good for something. Remember Kris, if you need to sell cheese just get out there and offer it as an aphrodisiac!" The shepherd gestured for Will to use his fingers to scoop up the gooey cheese. Somewhat reluctantly Will proceeded to dip his hand into the fermented goat stomach and produced a scoop of glistening curds. With each taste of pungent cheese, he took large gulps of wine to wash it down and remembered that this was his dinner that night.

The cheese is called callu de cabreddu, a strong cheese with an exceptionally pronounced bucky flavour. "Because of the way it was made, it had that great primeval feeling, that this was the way the cheese was invented and this was the way cheese should be," Will said. "[It was] definitely one of those moments where I had to question whether I really should be putting it in my mouth. The cheese itself was fascinating – the experience a little scary."

Callu de cabreddu is still made according to traditional methods once used by the prehistoric Astor tribes that originally inhabited the island. When a kid is butchered, its fourth stomach is emptied and cleaned thoroughly. It is then filled with raw milk and hung up to mature on stands in a cool place. The cheese is then aged, a process that lasts until the stomach stiffens to almost board-like hard, for around four months. During aging it can be smoked, where the fumes from the outside and the natural enzymes in the milk combine to encourage coagulation producing a creamier cheese with a tangy taste and a pungent smell. Will described the callu de cabreddu experience as fascinating, challenging and one saved by extremely alcoholic red wine.

Another four amazing cheese stories immediately followed: maggots in Corsica, moose in Sweden, yaks in Bhutan and shooting cheese in England, all of which I will save for another day. All of this confirms the wonderful tapestry of cheese all over the world. Finally, I asked Will about his favourite cheese. He doesn't have one – his favourite changes with the season and the country he is visiting at the time.

» **Kris Lloyd** is the Head Cheese Maker of **Woodside Cheese Wrights**

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