

From the Kitchen

25 July 2016



July is a month for snoutings. There are three major birthdays – including mine – two anniversaries and a ‘Christmas in July’ dinner. All of them involve snoutings.

snouting, /snaʊtɪŋ/ *noun* a social gathering at which too much is eaten and/or drunk.

Etymology: an outing, combined with the image of a porcine or bovine gathering at a trough.

Never heard of such a thing? Well, ‘snouting’ is an inelegant term of what should be an outing for an elegant gathering around a lunch or dinner table at a restaurant but has most, or all, of the participants overindulging.

It is a good thing that this is in the middle of the southern winter, when we all need more fuel to keep warm.

A snouting can include a stage performance (not by the snouters) with gastronomic indulgence before or after the show – or both, as happened with seeing *Matilda* the musical. It can include wine and/or ice-cream during the show. It is all part of what a snouting is about.

One could stretch the definition to include domestic gatherings, involving relatives, family or friends. Of course, it is not strictly a snouting for those at whose house this over-indulgence is to take place, but it *is* for those who travel there. This can be for Christmas, Hanukah, Ramadan, Diwali, Vesak, birthdays, weddings, or a quiet dinner party for twenty intimate friends.

When I was at university, we had frequent snoutings to Jimmy Watson’s wine bar and the Pig and Whistle. There was even a society of snouters, euphemistically called MUGS – Melbourne University Gourmands’ Society. Most members were heavy drinkers and over-eaters, frequently missing lectures or falling asleep in them.

One of the favourite places for a snouting is an hour’s drive from central Melbourne. The cuckoo Restaurant is in the heart of the Dandenong Ranges and offers a smorgasbord of food (all you can eat) and of entertainment (louder and more than I can stomach).

An ‘all-you-can-eat’ establishment can be considered a metaphor for our consumerist society. It places temptation in front of us and we need to exercise extreme self-discipline not to take and take until we have taken too much; we can end up feeling sick in the stomach or sick at heart, or both.

There is a moral aspect to this: eating more than one needs is not ethically defensible or environmentally sustainable. Add this to the food that is thrown out in affluent societies and it becomes immoral. However, ironically, eating less does not make more available to those who are undernourished.

Food equity is not as simple as redistributing what we grow and produce. There are many countries where people go hungry, even though those countries produce enough for everyone within their borders. But it is cheaper for, say, the food grown in the south to be exported than shipping it to the north, where agriculture is not viable. Sometimes it is also a consequence of international markets – a foreign country may pay the southern farmers more than they can get in their northern markets; or overseas interests get the southern farmers to grow crops to be used for biofuel in Europe.

Sometimes ‘southern’ farmers are using GM seeds and they are contractually obliged to sell their produce to a multinational company.

Locally, we have another food security problem. The grocery market is dominated by two supermarket chains. They have screwed dairy farmers down to an unsustainable price so that the supermarkets can sell milk at \$1 per litre. We cannot even buy bottled water for that little. And dairy farmers are abandoning their farms; some are committing suicide.

It is all a consequence of food moving from being a necessity for life to being a commodity, like almost everything else in our modern society. It can this be manipulated and controlled by those who gave no hand in its production.

So, we go snouting with little, if any awareness of the complex chain of events that brings the food to us, or the people involved. If we educated ourselves better to really know what is involved with every step in bringing food to us, we would possibly eat with more awareness and probably stop eating food we don’t need. And probably eat less of what isn’t food at all.