

Dear Diary:

Tuesday 7/28:

I arrived a day early to cheese camp to scope out the city. I do not understand this thing called “pizza strips”. Having grown up in Queens this food does not compute. I’m afraid that people in Rhode Island are very different from those of us who know that pizza should have cheese and is never sold on the shelves next to English muffins. Oh the horror!

Tomorrow is the day for registering and for a group of my peers to take the CCP exam. I am so excited that there’s finally a rubric for testing knowledge in our field. It’s been a long time coming. My only disappointment is that all the spots were full by the time I went to sign up.

Wednesday 7/29:

I registered, brought my bag of goodies back to the hotel room and nearly had a heart attack! Instead of a badge identifying me as a scholarship recipient I have one that identifies me as a PRESENTER! For one brief and crazy moment -that felt like an eternity, I panicked because I couldn’t remember agreeing to present anything, and didn’t know what to do. Eventually sanity took over and I went back to registration to get my correct badge. I did keep the presenter badge though. One day I may need it.

Thursday 7/30:

This is the first day of sessions. The welcome session was a great way to start cheese camp, but I couldn’t wait for my first session, analyzing the science of taste. This session was amazing! I was shocked to see how quickly I was able to differentiate between all of the glasses of water. We all know how smells affect our ability to taste, but I was still surprised by some of the tests we did. At one point we were all blindfolded for a tasting. We were given three different bites of cheese. Two of them were the same, and one was different. There were four trials. On the last round I was standing next to someone who was wearing perfume. It wasn’t a strong scent, but it was enough to make me doubt what I was tasting, and I got the fourth one wrong. This was absolutely one of my favorite exercises that I’ve ever done, and I’m really excited to have had my palate expanded.

It’s time for the thing I’ve been dreading ever since I got notice of receiving this scholarship: The Annual Business Meeting & Lunch. Apparently I’m going to have to stand up and receive my official certificate. WHY?! Why can’t I just hide somewhere and have it mailed to me? Do I have to get up on a stage? What if they say my name wrong? Am I supposed to correct them? Am I supposed to say something? Oh, wait a minute. That’s it? It’s over already? That was easy.

Now we are giving well-earned congratulations to Cathy Strange for being such a positive agent of progress in the cheese world. It’s amazing how many people here have worked at Whole Foods.

The Career 101 session is fantastic! My cheese love was a side effect of working in restaurants that turned into a passion. I love being a monger, a buyer and a teacher, but have been wondering what else is out there. How far can you go in a cheese career if you don’t own your own shop, and don’t want to

be a cheesemaker? This session gave me a lot of ideas about other aspects of the industry that I hadn't even thought of.

Meeting the cheesemaker is one of my favorite parts of the annual conference. I love trying new cheeses, re-visiting old ones and having interaction with the cheesemakers. This year I also got to connect with some cheesemakers in my area that I didn't even know of and due to their exposure at the event I've gotten the paperwork rolling to start bringing them into the co-op. I've brought my mini recorder with me to help me remember everyone I've met and every cheese I've tasted. This is so much better than trying to write notes while shoveling cheese in my mouth and shaking someone's hand.

I really want to go back to the hotel and review everything that's happened today, but the opening reception is going to begin and I've got to go.

For the past few years I've been observing the cheese world from just outside of everyone's orbit and have been nervous about coming back to the fold. It's like I never left! I've been embraced (literally, more often than not) by so many of my fellow cheese nerds, that it's virtually impossible to feel awkward; although I manage to be awkward nonetheless.

I'm exhausted. I don't think I can "human" any more. I've got to crash. Maybe just one more glass of wine before I go to bed.

Friday 7/31:

Who doesn't want to start their day with a discussion featuring representation from the FDA? My grandmother always told me that if I don't have anything nice to say, to keep my mouth shut. I'll just say this: I hope that there are more opportunities for the cheese community to interact with the FDA and I hope that together we can work to keep the American cheese industry thriving.

One of my favorite parts of camp is the town hall meeting. It's really interesting to hear from people all over the industry. Apparently I had my Wheaties this morning because before I knew it I was wandering up to the mike to have my voice heard. Yes, I was nervous as all get out, but how often will I get the opportunity to have hundreds of people watch me while I awkwardly read off of a paper napkin? I am determined to take advantage of every opportunity I have at camp. Even if it means I have to shimmy my ever-widening butt through an obstacle course of tables.

I'm learning more about the Basque region; the history and the cheese. I really do need to travel more. Maybe a trip to Spain is in order. This session is making me yearn to explore the world. Maybe I should talk to my friends' mom. She's a travel agent. I bet she could help me find an economical way to go abroad. I'm going to have to learn to drive stick shift.

I need to seriously start thinking about applying for the Daphne Zepos Teaching Award. I've been to presentations by two of the former recipients and I can't imagine how much information they've

absorbed from their trips. Next year I'm definitely applying. Now I've just got to narrow my focus down to one subject. I've got a few months, which should give me enough time to come up with a proposal.

The awards ceremony is fantastic! This year I feel like there were more small cheesemakers being recognized for their craft and that was awesome! Even without a single drop of alcohol in me I turned into a "WOOOOOOO girl". Such an exciting night!

Saturday 8/1:

I've been to a session by Ari from Zingerman's before, but hearing him talk about open book management is truly inspiring. We just started implementing OBM at the co-op, but are struggling a bit. I can't wait to bring some of the ideas from this session back with me to share with management.

The festival of cheese is insane. There is so much cheese that one could get lost. I used my smartphone to take pictures of everything I loved, and my mini-recorder to do tasting notes. Living in a small town in New England I don't have many opportunities to try cheeses from the west coast, but even more exciting is trying cheeses from places like Kentucky, Nebraska, Missouri and Colorado. It's a bit overwhelming in the most delicious whey. Is it possible that I've eaten too much cheese?

Sunday 8/2:

I'm at the cheese sale so clearly I haven't had enough cheese. I'm going home with two huge bags filled with cheese, and I know just what to do with all of it. I've had a wonderful time at camp this year and am incredibly grateful and humbled by the John Crompton scholarship committee for giving me the opportunity to learn, grow and experience camp in Providence, Rhode Island. I hope they know how much this experience means to me and how proud I am to have been selected.

Tuesday 8/25

I left the cheese sale with over sixty pounds of cheese. I spent hours breaking down the large blocks, wrapping them and recruiting a co-worker to help me label all of the pieces so I could make small grab bags for my co-workers. Thanks to everyone's love of cheese I've raised over \$300 for the ACE Foundation. I'm going to put a check in the mail-today. I loved the conference, I loved sharing cheese with my co-workers and I'm filled with good memories, a journal full of session notes, a recorder full of notes and a slowly dwindling vegetable drawer full of cheese.