

## ABOVE THE BRIM

# Living in, loving and writing about Petaluma

I am honored that Frances Rivetti thought of me when she considered taking a break from her fortnightly column.

Although our styles differ, we both relish writing about the people, culture, history and continued bounty that we get to enjoy by living in Petaluma.



**HOUSTON PORTER**

I met Frances years ago, when she was one my judges for the Great Petaluma Chili Cookoff, and have been a fan of hers ever since. I enjoy running into her at just about every Petaluma fundraiser, food event, festival and parade, where we exchange food and farming news and gossip. Frances has been optimistic and supportive of my writing since day one. She has never been competitive or condescending, even though I was the new kid on the block and we tend to write in the same genre, which is food, farming, Petaluma ... and more food. This encouragement speaks volumes about her character. For that, and her commitment to enriching our beloved Petaluma community, I consider her a friend, a mentor and maybe even a bit of an idol.

One of my favorite things about Frances

is that she never grows complacent about the wonderful area we live in. She also seems to know everyone and everything relating to Petaluma food and farming.

Even though I am a local, with deep roots in the community, I was not surprised to learn new things about Petaluma while reading her columns, and her recent book, "Fog Valley Crush." Growing up in Petaluma, with many the Farmini\* friend, I thought I knew just about everything about the farms and ranches surrounding our town. But within just the first few pages of "Fog Valley Crush" I was already learning interesting tidbits that I might never have known about otherwise.

Farmini: a term I coined while attending Petaluma High, as an affectionate alternative to simply using "farmers," which is how everyone else referred to our local ranch and farm family friends. With so many "inis," "Farmini" seemed appropriate, but included more than just Giacomini, Ielmorini, Dolcini, Flocchini, Lazzini, Gambonini, Cerini, Pasquini, Thomasini, Lazzarini, Orsini, Pelfini, Bradanini, Tamburini, to name a few. Also lumped in were both those with "i" sounds at the end of their name (Camozzi, Figone, Grossi, Brody, Benedetti, Moretti, Bertolucci, Franchetti, Mattei, Calegari, Volpi, Bianchi, Lisandrelli, Lanatti, Benanti, Perozzi, Pozzi, Polzoni,

Martinelli, etc.), as well as those without (Cardoza, Barlas, Corda, Souza, Cordoza, Laureano, Poncia, Machado, Mendonca, etc.)

You will come to find that I am a major name-dropper, but never the faux elite, like Hollywood actors or Nashville music stars. I stick to those that have a true and valuable impact on our community, (... and those that have something to do with food, like Frances Rivetti, Tara Smith, Suzanne Alexandre, Laurie Figone and Amber Balshaw ... just to name a few.)

These historic Petaluma families have been a huge influence in my life, both because of personal friendships and through their continued role enriching Petaluma's diverse culture. Just as in my real life, these names account for a good portion of my first column, so I look forward to introducing myself more, and sharing my Petaluma rants, raves and reviews in future columns. While I keep Frances' column space warm for her, I hope to keep you all as educated, enthralled and entertained with the goings-on in Petaluma as she has done for all these years.

*(I look forward to your feedback, as well as hearing about any Petaluma food news that you choose to share with me at "Above the Brim" on Facebook or [abovethebrim@houstonporter.com](mailto:abovethebrim@houstonporter.com).)*