



# the Weekly Grind

STORY BY BETH JUDY

PHOTOS BY JEREMY LURGIO

The love of food sends toy store owner to the butcher shop once a week to make a wide variety of sausages

If it happens to be Tuesday and you phone Missoula's alternative toy store, The Joint Effort, looking for proprietor Bill Stoianoff (pronounced "Stein-off"), you'll invariably be told, "He's making sausage." Tuesday's the day Stoianoff disappears into a local certified meat market to work magic with up to 300 pounds of mostly pork—"80/20 (80 percent meat, 20 percent fat) boned-out shoulder trim," he proclaims. In one long day he grinds meat for any number of his 22 lines—from classics like brats, kielbasa and Italian to more exotic offerings like French Apple, Tuscan (with sun-dried tomatoes) and Jamaican Jerk. He measures in pounds of ▶

seasonings, regrinds everything and stuffs and links the sausages—"I can do 150 pounds in fifteen minutes," he boasts. He ends by packaging, labeling and freezing them.

There's no mistaking his product. Browning in a pan, his creations, like Southern belles, don't sweat, they glisten. The air fills with aroma that gets your mouth watering and your mind philosophizing about the good things in life. From the sausage label, a caricature of ex-hippie Stoianoff grins at you, the round face topped by his signature Basque beret. Beside the drawing, letters read, "Uncle Bill's Sausages."

Stoianoff was dubbed Uncle Bill in Jamaica, where he spent vacation time in the same little town for five years running. Exposure to other cultures, Stoianoff says, has been his main education about food and cooking. Surprisingly, this began in Missoula, where he grew up. "It's more diverse than you'd think. On Sundays, I was just another kid at our Italian neighbors' long table. It was like a Fellini movie. Christmases, we went first to Fong's house (the owner of Ming's Restaurant) for wonton soup, then home for turkey."

In 1971, Stoianoff started traveling. "I hadn't been further east than Miles City and I moved to Marrakech, Morocco, for six months. I came back totally educated." Well not totally; two years later he traveled in Nepal, Afghanistan—"before the Russians, when it was nice"—and India. In Bombay, laid up with a broken leg, he began reading a Chinese cookbook and became intrigued. He got to know the owner of a Chinese restaurant and began formal training in Chinese cuisine. "First, I learned how to shop. Mr. Lee said, 'You can't take bad ingredients and make good food out of them. But you can take good ingredients and make great food out of them.' Next—for weeks—I learned how to cut. In Chinese cooking you spend four hours cutting food that cooks in 15 minutes."



Learning and caring about ingredients led Stoianoff to sausage. It happened in 1977, in the Mission District, a predominantly Latino quarter of San Francisco. "I was visiting a friend, and one morning I went out to gather ingredients for breakfast burritos." Fresh, handmade tortillas, veggies, eggs and a package of chorizo—it was looking promising. Then, walking back, he glanced at the sausage label. "The first ingredient was 'lymph nodes.' It got ruder from there. I said, 'I don't want to eat no lymph nodes.' I threw it—about 40 feet—into a garbage can. And it came to me: I could make sausage out of pork shoulder."

Now he makes his own chorizo. A woman in Oaxaca ▶

Facing page: Bill Stoianoff, of Uncle Bill's Sausages, leans against his sign at the final Clark Fork River Market this fall. He has been peddling his tasty sausages at the market since its inception a few years ago. Top: In the early morning hours before daylight, Stoianoff loads packages of sausage from his freezer to his coolers in preparation for the Clark Fork River Market. A farmer and pig figurine along with two Western Montana Fair blue ribbons sit on a shelf above a cooler at his business, The Joint Effort. Right: As the sun rises on a cool fall morning, Stoianoff visits fellow vendors at the market and gives them a scoop of special homemade chocolate ice cream he made for the last market of the season.







Bill Stoianoff has fun laughing with a few customers while selling his sausage at the Clark Fork River Market in Missoula.

gave him the recipe, which features ancho chiles, vinegar and cloves. It doesn't contain lymph nodes. In fact, Uncle Bill has a set spiel about his sausage that ends, "No noses, hoses, roses or toeses."

But lots of other foods have shoddy ingredients. Why the sausage crusade? Because, he explains, you can find quality in most everything else. Grocery stores in Missoula are great, he says, and if they don't have it, they'll get it for you. But quality sausage just could not be found. Along the same lines, Stoianoff first became associated publicly with food in relation to another commodity: hot sauce. Unable to find many of the flavors he enjoyed abroad, he began seeking them out. These days, The Joint Effort is home to one of the most diverse collections of hot sauce in Montana.

You can't find Stoianoff's sausage in grocery stores, restaurants, or on the Web—yet. He's working on the federal license needed to sell in such venues. The application process is grueling, but Stoianoff's dream leads him on. "I'd like to see my sausage in local stores. Costco says they're interested. It'd be nice to do a non-Montana thing: get out of poverty."

Uncle Bill's Sausage typically sells in packages of five for \$6, although items requiring pricey ingredients can be a bit more. Bratwurst and the Italian lines are the most popular among buyers. Stoianoff also makes and sells sauerkraut and German mustards.

Ray Risho, who started Perugia and other legendary Missoula restaurants, confirms that Uncle Bill's sausages make the grade. "They're the only ones I buy, personally. I know everything that's in them—there's no 'mystery meat.' It's nice to have that kind of product available in the community."

Currently, Stoianoff is licensed to sell his sausages from a big cooler in his store and at Missoula's outdoor Clark Fork River Market. He loves dealing directly with customers. "Food is a wonderful language," he says. Pressing packages of frozen sausage into people's hands, he always gives them a recipe—a story, really—that begins, "Take a...(knife, an onion, a pan, a can of beans)" and ends, "It's really good!" **M**

*Kevin Red Star*

## Kevin Red Star Gallery



*Two Whistles' Spirit Ponies*  
By Kevin Red Star  
acrylic on canvas painting  
30" x 40"



*"Buffalo Ribs" Medicine Man*  
By Kevin Red Star  
acrylic on canvas painting  
30" x 40"

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