

**GOURMET CAME TO MAMA SVILAR - Red Fenwick, The Denver Post Sun, May 31, 1981**

Maybe building a better mouse trap isn't your thing. Well don't be discouraged. There's a better way to get the world to beat a path to your door. It isn't simple or easy, but here's the formula:

Cook up a mess of better food for hungry folks to eat.

Quite a few years ago, I interviewed a notable food lover who was world famous as an authority on the food business. His own personal recipe for success, however, was telling other folks where to dine. His name was Duncan Hines.

One look at Mr. Hines and you knew right off that here was a virtuoso with the knife and fork. Tailors and belt-makers loved him. Anybody who did not consult Duncan Hines' guide to the best cafes before he set off in search of a good bill of fare, could fall far short of faring well.

Mr. Hines and I said grace and got right down to the main course. After he'd expounded poetically on the gustatory delights of Paris, Hong Kong, New York City, San Francisco and other foreign ports, I asked him if he'd ever eaten at Hudson, Wyoming.

HE WAS STARTLED. Then he grinned and exclaimed: "Ah yes! That tiny town. Splendid food — excellent. And what a surprise."

Duncan Hines had a disconcerting habit of dining critically in this or that beanery, and not identifying himself. Later he'd write about the experience.

I, therefore, don't know if Mama Bessie Svilar knew she once served the great gourmet. But he knew it. And he remembered her.

And Hudson, that little shy-appearing former coal mining town about halfway between Riverton and Lander, in Western Wyoming, was once rated as one of the finest places to dine in the United States.

All this came to mind last week when I read in Phil McAuley's column in the Casper Star Tribune that Mama Svilar had died on May 25 in the hospital in Lander.

Old friend McAuley, with whom I've fractured bourbon many times, said Mama Svilar would be remembered by thousands of tourists and other visitors. I'll raise the ante to hundreds of thousands.

Mama Svilar had a way with pots and pans like Luther Burbank had with plant and tree life. She wasn't satisfied with ordinary cooking — she improvised. Her culinary imagination and creativity were excelled only by her generous disposition.

WHEN YOU ATE at Mama Svilar's, you et. I think it was Will Rogers who said, "Folks who ain't et have never eaten." Chicken? Mama Svilar served you all you could stuff under your belt. But first, there were pigs in a blanket, soup, salad — and spaghetti!

(Why don't we sneak out right now for a quick snack? I'm ready!)

Mama Svilar and her husband, Dan, the one-time coal miner, put Hudson on the map in big red letters that dripped with gravy and honey and meat juices. People heard about Hudson from friends who'd partaken of Mama Svilar's cooking, and they came from distant parts of the nation just to treat their taste buds to her robust epicurean delights.

There's no telling what might have happened to the miniature village when the mines closed there in 1942 had it not been for the Svilar, Mama and Big Dan from Yugoslavia. Dan was born there in 1886, Bessie Sevenovich in 1895.

Dan immigrated to the United States in 1906, Bessie in 1909. Prior to marrying Dan, Bessie ran a boarding house in Grand Island, Nebraska, and married Joe Mastelica there. After his death, Bessie moved to Hudson in 1916 and married Dan. He died in 1969 at 83.

DAN, WHO'D WORKED in the coal mines, ran a bar and pool parlor, and it was there that Mama Svilar began plying miners with huge portions of her own brand of cooking.

Dan did something few men have done before or since. He owned and operated his own electric power company — the Svilar Light and Power Co., founded in the 1920's. It still serves 250 customers in Hudson.

The Svilar family already had become a legend in Wyoming before World War II, but when Dan died, Mama Svilar kept on in the family tradition. Her last words, according to McAuley, were:

"I'm so tired."

The whispered statement was understandable. Mama Svilar had worked hard all her life, raised a family, cared for a good husband, and made Hudson, Wyoming famous for fine food.

Rest in Peace, Mama Svilar. I remember you well.