



WHAT HAPPENS AT SYMPOSIUM

...shouldn't stay at Symposium

BY SARA CAMP MILAM

THIS PAST OCTOBER MARKED MY tenth Southern Foodways Fall Symposium. In 2009, the year SFA explored connections between food and music, I arrived as a volunteer with little idea of what to expect. Within hours, I was listening—and then joining in—as Alice Randall led the audience in “Will the Circle Be Unbroken.” Later, I helped serve a lunch cooked by David Chang. (Afterwards, star-struck, I thanked him. I’m sure he remembers.)

I returned as a Fall Symposium volunteer in 2010 and 2011. Two thousand twelve was my first symposium as a full-time member of the SFA staff. That year, I realized how little I’d understood, even as a volunteer, about the months of

Photos by Brandall Laughlin



planning and preparation needed to pull off the talks and meals of Symposium weekend. All hands on deck is a cliché, but it’s one that perfectly describes SFAWHQ in the months leading up to the the big event.

Yet the Fall Symposium serves only about 350 guests. That’s barely 15 percent of our membership, and an even smaller fraction of our audience. We asked ourselves: If some of our best work came to life each year at our flagship Symposium, why weren’t we sharing it with as many readers as possible? Insert collective staff forehead smack.

In this issue, we close out our year of Reading Food with five features from our twenty-first Fall Symposium. In 2019, we dig into a vital, yet underexplored truth: Food Is Work. Planning is underway for our Winter Symposium in Birmingham, Summer Field Trip in Bentonville, and of course Fall Symposium here in Oxford. If you can join us for any (or all!) of our three 2019 Symposia, we look forward to welcoming you. And even if you can’t, you can pull up a seat via the pages of *Gravy*.

Happy New Year, and happy reading. 🍷