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English 101

18 October 2010

You Are What You Eat

Challenging an issue in society can be a difficult task which involves a purpose and position, as well as methods and materials to support one's cause. French lawyer and politician Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin comments, "Tell me what you eat, I'll tell you who you are" (Brillat-Savarin). The world has linked eating and food to the cultures that represent our lives. Food brings people together with a nurturing sense of a common bond in which we share. Growing up in a household with Irish influence from my mom's side of the family, and a strong Italian impact from my father's side of the family, I have had a childhood with meat as a key part of our cuisine. However, recently my position on eating meat has changed. The meat industry has brought many conflicting issues surrounding the process of the production of the meat. Would you eat food that contains harmful ingredients? What about meat that is unnaturally raised on a filthy "farm" permeated with disease and abuse?

Like many people, I love to eat, and not only that, but I also enjoy cooking. Cooking is a form of creativity that my family has instilled in my life. From my earliest memories, I can recall helping my mother stir in the chocolate chips into her scrumptious chocolate chip cookies, all while flour dusted upon the clothes that I wore. My favorite dishes to make are ones that involve meat. The diverse dishes that can be created with one type of meat intrigues me; a

pound of ground beef can turn into the all-American hamburger, or a spicy taco dinner.

Whenever I would go to my Nana's house, she would talk to me about food. Following our discussion, we would make a traditional Italian dish, such as homemade meatballs or bountiful amounts of anise-flavored pizzelles. Not only did this satisfy my cravings, but it also formed special bonds with my family members.

A tradition that my mom, my siblings, and myself have is that every summer we go to the local farms and pick fruit, then following we help my mom preserve her homemade jams. The summer starts off with picking plump black cherries cascading above our heads, and the season ends by picking some tart raspberries and blackberries so delicate to touch. Returning from the fruit patches, my four siblings and I join my mom into the congested kitchen which quickly rises in temperature as we begin the jam-making process. Each of us has a job which varies from year to year, ranging from washing the fruit, cutting it into small chunks, or even something as simple as washing the sticky dishes. Once finished, the kitchen counter becomes lined with rows of mason jars filled with this fresh, homemade jam. My mom also takes pride in her vegetable and herb garden that grows in our backyard. During the summer months, my family uses the crops from this patch of land for various things such as peppermint tea, stuffed red peppers, canning salsa, or even using the lavender as a fragrance in the house. I absolutely love the feeling that I endure by going out into the fields and gathering some of earth's best assets from my mom's garden. The foods not only taste so much better, but are also healthier.

I can connect with Novella Carpenter, author of *Farm City: The Education of an Urban Farmer*, as she decides to establish her own garden in an empty lot near her house in the city of Oakland, California. Carpenter's message is inspiring; ~~in that that where~~ one's life should not limit them from producing and raising organic produce. **Carpenter's memoir provides the idea**

that raising your own food is cheaper, cleaner, is beneficial to the land, and also builds confidence and independencecommunity. She defends herself of growing her own food by stating that it is in her cultural DNA. Carpenter further encourages this notion by emphasizing, “It’s your birthright too. Your grandmother, like mine, grew her own tomatoes, killed her own chickens, and felt a true connection to her food” (Carpenter 24). The fresh locally grown produce that my family grows and picks is economically beneficial, does not contain any harmful chemicals, and also helps to support the local farm community.

Unlike Carpenter, one food we do not raise at my house is meat. However, growing up, meat was a staple to eat daily. Meat is a food that is usually encouraged for our children to eat. I can remember looking forward to going grocery shopping with my mom. Once we arrived at the deli counter, the deli worker would hand me and all the other young children a rolled-up slice of German bologna. Even though I ate meat my whole life, I cannot understand how Carpenter can raise an animal, form a relationship with it, even to the extent of naming it, and then has the mindset to kill and eat that animal. She explains herself and the joy she had consuming her turkey, Harold, acknowledging, “Harold had a good life, and now he would have a good death—quick and painless—at the hands of someone he knew” (Carpenter 92). I appreciate Carpenter’s want to raise meat in a way in which the animal receives a “happy” life, nevertheless, spending the amount of time and intimate moments with these animals that she does, truly shocks me that she is still able to eat them.

Jonathan Safran Foer’s investigative book, *Eating Animals*, challenges this issue by comparing this idea of eating an animal you raise to eating a dog. Foer uses gruesome tactics to convince the reader of the immorality of killing your pet as he argues, “No reader of this book would tolerate someone swinging a pickax to a dog’s face” (Foer 31). I have a pet Chihuahua,

and it is disturbing to even contemplate the notion of eating him for dinner. Foer writes his book in order share with the reader that animals should not be treated unjustly, especially if they are going to be used for meat. Although, how am I still about to eat the meat that sits on the plate in front of me? [Foer would agree that it](#) is still an animal, right?

At the time, I was oblivious to what that meat consisted of. I knew it was from an animal, but I never asked myself questions such as, where does this meat come from? Did the animal live a “happy” life before arriving to the supermarket? Or, is this meat even safe to eat? Many other people ignore these questions as well, and would rather just eat what taste good, not considering the dangers of meat. Foer discusses the ignorance many humans share in regards to knowing about how their meat is processed. I ultimately believe that it is human nature to avoid learning and understanding more about matters that make us uneasy. Foer, who grew up in a meat-eating home, and is currently vegetarian, admits to being unfamiliar with the meat producing process commenting, “I didn’t know what animals *were*, or even approximately how they were farmed or killed...but then we [Foer and his wife] decided to have a child” (Foer 9-10). Sometimes it takes a certain moment in our lives to want to learn more about a particular subject matter. For Foer, it was his decision to have a son and desire to be educated about what his son will be consuming; for myself, I wanted to learn more about what I am putting in my body and if it is harming me.

Culture and tradition play a major role in why I have chosen to eat meat most of my life. Different holidays in my family involve different types of meat. For Christmas we eat ham; [for](#); Easter, lamb; [for](#); St. Patrick’s Day, corned beef; [and](#) Thanksgiving, turkey. In the chapter, “Storytelling”, Foer reveals his thoughts on Thanksgiving and its traditions in America stating, “The Thanksgiving meal is America’s founding act of consciousence consumption” ([Foer](#) 266).

I do not believe that meat-eating Americans fully understand what they are consuming. As “the worst animal fit of any animal for the factory models,” why must we consume such a product that could do harm not only to us, but the ecosystem, as well as the actual animal (Foer 266)? The taste should not be worth the consequences of how that turkey or any other meat is produced. I am ashamed to have not known about the effects of factory farming prior to reading *Eating Animals*.

Now as an adult, I realize my eating habits have been changing. I am anxious to learn more about what I put in my mouth because I have realized that I only get this one life to live, therefore I should take care of my body. Foer’s investigative book offers an abundance of information that has definitely influenced my views on eating meat. I have read this book’s entirety this past summer, and Foer’s persuasive writing defiantly triggered my conscience to think about what I was eating before I ate it. Revisiting this work in my college English course has further challenged my beliefs on why I even eat meat, and if it really is necessary for my life. To help me better understand if meat was really vital in my life, I decided to challenge myself by eliminating meat from my diet. I have tried this before, but ~~unsuccessfully~~ failed because I lacked motivation. ~~Successfully Foer has convinced me to try again.~~ In the past month I have begun my experiment and stopped eating meat completely. The first week was challenging. It seemed as if when I would enter the dining hall, meat just appealed to me more than ever. My favorite dish, corned beef and cabbage, was being served, as well as my favorite soup, Italian Wedding Soup; both dishes composed of meat. As inspiration I would just have to remember what Foer explored in his book, and the alarming details he discovered about factory farm produced meats. After the first week, my urges to eat meat, for the most part, had come to an end. It has now been a month, and I am proud of myself for getting this far, knowing that I am

not “contaminating” my body. Foer makes a powerful comparison which really put in perspective the danger [of](#) eating and the crime of producing factory-farmed meat as he emphasizes,

It shouldn't be the consumer's responsibility to figure out what's cruel and what's kind, mentally destructive and what's sustainable. Cruel and destructive products should be illegal. We don't need the option of buying children's toys with lead paint, or aerosols with chlorofluorocarbons, or medicines with unlabeled side effects. And we don't need the option of buying factory-farmed animals ([Foer-266](#)).

Foer brings up this point that persuades me to never want to eat factory-farmed meats again. Realistically I do not see myself staying a vegetarian all my life. I do miss a lot of foods that I share when eating with friends and family, though I will be more careful in which I will no longer eat these immoral and dangerous meat products produced on these “farms”. I had a conversation with my mother about the issue, and she completely agrees with me. I actively agree with Carpenter's statement that, “In meat factories, the animals weren't allowed to be truly alive, and that was wrong” ([Carpenter-56](#)). I also commend her actions to avoid the factory-farmed animals. As a family, we are taking action by buying all our beef and chicken from a local butcher who receives his meat from a farm in my neighborhood. It is reassuring to know that no antibiotics, [or](#) hormones, ~~or abuse~~ are given to the animals, [and that they were raised in a humane environment](#).

~~What someone eats can characterize who that person is as an individual. As~~[When](#) Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin declares, “Tell me what you eat, I'll tell you who you are,” ~~the main point being, arguing that~~ what one eats defines who part of one's identity is. Knowing and

understanding food consumed can help better the wellbeing of an individual. Foer and Carpenter both share a common belief that I agree with as well; animals should not be tortured or treated immorally, and our foods should be safe to consume. Personally, it is disgusting to even think of myself eating factory-farmed meat again. It is unfortunate that this is even an issue in society today, and even sadder that more people do not know about it.

Works Cited

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