

Introduction

When I was young, my paternal grandparents had a market farm in Surrey, British Columbia. They had an orchard, chickens, and rows of carrots and beans. They had berries and rhubarb, potatoes and corn. At dinnertime, Grandma Wheeler would fire up the woodstove and disappear into her dark, cool pantry. There, she would open jars, cut up a rabbit, send us out for berries or to check for more eggs. Grandpa had soil ground into his hands that would never wash out no matter how he tried. He would sit at the table with one of those hands on each armrest of his big oak chair. His faint handprints are still on that chair, now part of its history, that my older sister refused to have sanded off when she had the rest of the set refinished.

My grandparents were fair, kind, gentle people. Only in retrospect do I realize they did not have a lot of money. To me, theirs was a place of riches — boxes of potatoes and apples, baskets of juicy berries, a pantry full of eggs. I took all of it completely for granted, until they moved onto an urban lot, and there stopped being a place in my existence where food grew on trees.

My second awareness of “food as riches” was in Malaysia in 1968. My family lived at the edge of a village where bananas, papayas, and mangoes dangled from the trees in the yards — even “poor” people had what seemed to be exotic fruit, free for the picking. Fish were brought in with nets from the sea, chickens scratched in gardens and again, while there were not a lot of commercial goods floating around, no one seemed to be starving. Then, after a year-and-a-half, we returned to North America, where our yards were sown with grass and shrubs, and where you had to drive to a store to get food.

Life has, for me (and millions of others), gotten more and more distant from “the garden” ever since. My own move to the country years ago did not protect me from the insanity. It is now illegal for me to buy an organic chicken from the farmer next door, but legal to buy food with over thirty measurable pesticides in it from across the planet. It is a world where the food in my nearest grocery store arrives from all corners of the globe, yet there is no protocol in place for our local farmers to sell their potatoes there. I live in a place where farmers markets and potlucks are being monitored by our “health” departments while dangerous international ingredients are finding their way onto our grocery shelves and where the massive industrial meat recalls are climbing each year. It is a planet of shifting powers and insane regulations, and many of us are feeling a certain lack of control over much that affects us.

This book is about bringing something back home — greater power over our food supply, confidence that what we nourish our children with was grown with care and love, and renewed awareness of our place in the grand scheme of things. I hope this book will remind readers that “power” is not a dirty word. We are powerful beings and can do good things and make change. My grandparents knew that. Their grandparents knew that. Let us not forget it.

— Robin Wheeler, 2008