

5-20-2011

Plowing by Moonlight: Notes from a Food Oasis

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Plowing by Moonlight: Notes from a Food Oasis

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Creative Writing
Creative Nonfiction

by

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B.A. Stanford University, 1976
M.A. University of Washington, 1985

May 2011

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Acknowledgment

The essay, “Sweet Life,” was originally published in the anthology, *What to Read in the Rain* by 826 Seattle: Seattle, Washington, 2010. All rights reverted to the author.

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Abstract

Plowing by Moonlight is a creative nonfiction exploration of the relationship between the people of Bainbridge Island, Washington, and the food they grow, eat, and share.

Creative nonfiction, creative writing, Bainbridge Island, Washington, food, sustainability

The Clueless Eater

In 1995, we were searching for a home where we could close a door between the piano and the living space. My husband and I had a six-year-old who played the piano constantly, and our charming, authentically 1928 home in Seattle could no longer contain all of our enthusiasms. We loved our North Seattle neighborhood, where we had lived for thirteen years, but could not find anything in our price range that did not have the same problems as our existing home – poor insulation, traffic, and a high noise level indoors and out.

On Bainbridge Island, we found a house that had been vacant for over a year. Built around 1980, it was set on an overgrown third of an acre. We visited the house three times, walking around the outside, peering in the windows. It had bad carpeting and signs of an unhappy dog. The seller had left his arts and crafts dining room furniture in place, giving us a way to imagine ourselves in this space, too. We loved the deep windowsills and the large lot, four times the size of our property in Seattle, with plenty of room between us and the neighbors. It was also walking distance to the heart of Winslow, where the grocery store, two bookstores, and the Post Office are located. We made an offer and got the house. We promised our son that we would build a new tree house for him in a big leaf maple to replace the one we would leave behind. Here, we slowed our pace and began to listen to the birds again.

We made friends with our neighbors, and discovered that we could buy food at a weekly farmers market, directly from the people who grew it. This was a delight and a convenience, but not the central factor in our lives. After I was diagnosed with some health problems, however, I was forced to think about food in a new way, as a part of the puzzle of keeping healthy while not dedicating all of my time and energy to food, nutrition and diet.

In the spring of 2010, I began to write a series of essays on the question, “Why did you become farmers?” asked of two couples I had known from their previous, book-related lives. Mostly I was curious, since I did not see the connection between book-loving and farming. The answers were both interesting and surprising to me.

Food and food-related topics are in the headlines every day. The Wednesday, September 29, 2010 issue of *The Seattle Times* had several headlines and stories in the first section alone, from “Hood Canal’s life and death battle (desperate fish rising to the surface)” to “USDA may take on more E. coli strains in meat”. According to a feature article in *Harper’s*, Goldman Sachs created an international wheat shortage in the 90’s by overselling wheat futures and driving up the cost of real wheat. The modern market is capable of creating artificial food shortages where food is available, but unaffordable in poorer countries.

I expanded my inquiries. The more people I talked to, the more people, I realized, were directly involved in food production on Bainbridge Island, from kitchen gardens to restaurant suppliers, from foragers to scavengers. Growing, gathering, preparing and eating local food is a major pastime, and at least the last part is something in which everyone, including indoor types like those in my household, participates. Food is the hub of most social events. Eating is not only an agricultural act, as Wendell Berry said, and an economic and political one, as Michael Pollan added, but a social and religious act as well.

Intermittently, starting in my early childhood, I lived in rural areas where my family grew some of its own food. From the age of one to six I lived with my parents and two older sisters in the San Bernardino Mountains of California, where my father planted a big square of corn behind the house. Ordered one day to scare off a big pheasant that was helping himself to the ripening corn, I stopped in frustration and curiosity to peel and taste a raw ear myself. It was

unbelievably good. After awhile, my father came out to see why I had not returned, and he too, began to nibble on an ear of corn. Finally, my mother came out to see what was going on, only to find all three of us, my father, myself and the pheasant, eating corn. There must be some reason people cook it.

Years later as a newlywed, I lived in Western Colorado and kept a big truck garden. Our property came with a share of precious water rights, and every two weeks I could divert the water into our ditches to soak the gummy red earth, as much clay as soil. This was a time of trial and error, but when we left four years later, I had to give away bags of tomatoes and zucchinis that we had been unable to eat, can, or otherwise get rid of. Growing food seemed easy.

The Northwest is not so forgiving. Water is plentiful but sunlight scarce, especially on our property, with its fringe of tall Douglas firs along the south and west boundaries. The natural soil has little organic matter and lots of rocks. In Seattle, I managed after seven years of failure to grow tomatoes in raised beds, which warmed the soil to enough to ripen the vegetables. The soil on Bainbridge is so poor, that local garden expert Ann Lovejoy recommends purchasing and dumping good soil directly on top of the existing soil, not even bothering to work it in.

I interviewed farmers and food sellers, who must track every aspect of the business to maintain their slim profit. Along with more questions about their work and philosophies, I found myself asking somewhat apocalyptic questions such as “Can this island support its own population?” and “If there were a food shortage, is there some way I could earn food from you?”

I felt foolish asking these questions, especially since I am no one’s idea of a good laborer. But it seemed important, in terms of my overall understanding. The more producers and vendors I interviewed, the more my questions seemed relevant. It turns out that if our outside food supply was interrupted, the local markets would run out of food in a day. And food production, at least

in the Pacific Northwest, is largely dependent on the amount of human labor that can be provided.

In the early 1900s, Bainbridge was dependent on a population of migrant harvesters made up of a mixed Filipino and First Nation population that moved between here, Canada, and Eastern Washington, following the harvests. The main crop was once strawberries – Marshall strawberries so luscious they were famously served to the Queen of England when she visited Victoria, British Columbia – but as it changed to organic vegetables and wine grapes, farmers on Bainbridge turned to “crop mobs” for harvesting. These include farmers, farm interns and volunteers who move systematically from farm to farm, using their mass to bring the harvest in quickly.

As I learned more from greengrocers, farmers, and chefs about where our food came from, I found tendrils reaching out from Bainbridge to my parents’ country of Mexico and back again, in a north/south relationship that probably existed long before the current residents arrived. Because of improved transportation, the reach from Bainbridge goes as far as Omotepe, Nicaragua, now, in a unique arrangement for our coffee, but the principles of food production remain the same: more sun equals a longer growing season, more labor equals a larger harvest. Politics and economics complicate, but do not negate these fundamentals.

I began to learn terms I had not heard, or at least had not listened to, before – community resiliency, value-added, factory organic, food security. I found myself squinting at those tiny tags on the fresh vegetables in groceries stores, and visiting the websites listed. Really, who are these people? Where were these chickens free-ranging? Who are the farmers on whom I am dependent for oranges in winter and watermelons in summer? And why did my doctor think that eating dark chocolate and drinking green tea would make me well?

While I have done a lot of historical research for my previous books, this was a different type of sleuthing, a search for the source of the Great American Dinner. In some ways, this exploration was as forbidding as Marlow's trip up the Congo in search of the heart of darkness. After all, eating meat, or "protein animals," involves the death of another creature on my behalf. Am I ready to confront this? In other ways, it is both enlightening and reassuring. There are rituals, of course, around our relationship with food, both secular and religious, that enable us to fit the physical world together with our cultures and belief systems. Not surprisingly, religious beliefs often support best practices in the farming and preparation of food. I am humbled by each and every one of the people who get up early and go outside to work every day, rain or shine, while I struggle to get out of bed in the dark.

I came across a quote that brought these elements into focus for me in *High Country News*: "There will be great clamor from climate refugees seeking a safe haven in those few parts where the climate is tolerable and food is available... We will need a new set of rules for (limiting the population in) climate oases."

I'm not ready to declare the end of the world, much less set the rules, but I realized that I live in a climate oasis. At some level, I must have recognized this all along, and this is in part why my neighbors and I expend so much energy tracking development and land use. It is an abundant but fragile environment, and on an island it is easy to see who is responsible for preserving it: we are. Bainbridge simply provides a microcosm of the choices we will all have to make soon as members of the human race.

Other questions arose as well:

Should I admire or disdain the friend who picks up and eats road kill? Am I asking these questions to ingratiate myself with my food-producing friends just in case? How do the relatively

wealthy inhabitants of Bainbridge Island differ from the survivalists I knew in Western Colorado? Do the same dangers haunt them?

I also took the time to contemplate the pleasures, beauty, and pain of certain foods. We have memories, associations, and practices with everything that we eat, and I'll admit I got a little obsessed with tracking some of them down. People answered my questions with patience and grace. I am not a farmer, a scientist, a gourmet chef or even a very good cook. I think I am a pretty average person in those respects. However, meeting these people forever changed the way I look at this overcast sky, this rocky soil, these trees, plants and animals. Our food comes directly from this, and it changed my understanding of our place in the world.

Sweet Life

Bainbridge Island curls like a fist of rock around Eagle Harbor on the western edge of Puget Sound, thirty-five minutes from downtown Seattle by ferry. Over half the working population commutes to Seattle every day on a Jumbo Mark II, either the *Tacoma* or the *Wenatchee*. The ferries resemble floating airports, they are so large and stable, each capable of carrying 2,500 passengers and 200 vehicles at a time. The soft seating is grouped into conversational units, or set to enjoy the scenery. Many prefer to listen to their ipods or read.

Once in awhile the placid waters of Puget Sound are rough enough that a ferry is delayed, and people must wait. Or the boat is held at the island for an ambulance taking a critical patient to one of the hospitals in Seattle. Otherwise, they must be airlifted by helicopter. One must be patient to live on an island. Off the northwest corner of Bainbridge is the short Agate Point Bridge, leading to the Kitsap Peninsula and all points west. Agate Pass used to be crossed by a small private ferry, and a few old-timers remember rousing the ferryman to take them home early in the morning from a night out.

I have joked that, if we were completely cut off from the mainland, Bainbridge Island, with its population of about 21,000, could live indefinitely off of locally made white wine and goat cheese. Every April the farmer's market reopens, and we have our choice of – goat cheese, honey, and a few vegetables. The truth is, our growing season is short, and there are just some things that won't grow here in quantity. The soil is bad, and savvy farmers have spent years amending their soil.

But also, members of the farmer's market protect their own interests. Products must be grown or made within Kitsap County, and farmers must be approved by the board. The owner of

an old produce stand near the highway no longer grows food but, a few years ago, tried to import produce from Eastern Washington to sell at the convenient spot. Members of the farmer's market got it shut down as a violation of their regulations.

As a result, most of our produce is still purchased through the locally owned Town & Country Market, and a Safeway store. Once, Bainbridge was famous for its strawberries, but a blight, along with the forced internment of Japanese American farmers during World War II, ended their production. By the fall, a greater variety is available, but as Americans, we are used to having seasonal products year-round: lettuce, tomatoes, broccoli, avocados, citrus fruits, things that grow in limited quantities or not at all in our cool, wet climate. "There are no seasons in the American supermarket," according to the movie, *Food, Inc.*

I first met Bob and Nancy Fortner when they owned Fortner Books in downtown Winslow. Fortner's specialized in used and rare books, and on a rainy day, I could sit in a comfortable chair and browse through the history of the west. Near the cash register, a cockatoo screamed at customers, and you could peer into a glass case at a copy of one of David Guterson's stories turned into an art book. As the book business changed, the Fortner's moved the store to their home, then went completely online before phasing out that part of their lives. Now they sell honey, soap, skin care products and preserves at the farmer's market. This is from their website:

Sweetlife Farm is a "cottage" business (just the two of us); we value quality over quantity, and urge you to purchase as things appeal to you, understanding that everything is a "limited edition," and may not be available again.

"We try to grow enough to feed ourselves and make value-added products," Nancy said, all made in their certified kitchen. We were sitting upstairs from the kitchen in a space full of bookcases that once held fat, illustrated volumes, but now served as a display and sales room for their products.

This is not the first transformation the Fortners have made. Although I knew this history, I made them recount it for me again. They met as medical professionals at the William Beaumont Army Medical Center in El Paso, Texas. They married and moved to the Bay area, where they lived in a house high in La Honda, and Bob practiced nephrology at El Camino Hospital. Bob, Nancy, and their little girl, Holly, moved to Bob's home state of Washington in 1992, and Bob continued to practice medicine part time, until he eventually became disillusioned with the profession.

"The changing ethics of the medical profession," he said, "contributed to the fragmentation of medical care." As doctor's groups tried to reorganize as businesses, he felt patient priorities taking second place: "When the pie gets smaller, the table manners change."

Sweetlife Farm is on one of the highest points on the island, maybe 300 feet above sea level. It often snows here when it does not snow at my house, which is about a hundred feet above the cold waters of Eagle Harbor. In the winter, the steep, gabled roofs shelter the entrances to their Arts and Crafts style home, and to the building that houses their business. "Christmas in the Country" is an island-wide event that encourages shoppers to travel from one venue to another, buying local, and the Fortners always host several artists whose wares compliment their own seasonal products such as "Cocoa Local" and Nancy's meticulously wrapped gift soaps.

"The evolution of none of this was planned," Bob said, "there are early decisions, early influences under which you fall." One was the writings of Helen and Scott Nearing. In 1954 they published *Living the Good Life*. Bob and Nancy discovered it in the 1970s. The book advocated a back to the land lifestyle, and described how the Nearings grew most of their food on a farm in Vermont. After Scott Nearing was kicked out of academia for being a Communist during the Depression, the book recounts how the two of them were able to sustain themselves with almost

nothing purchased from the outside, while leaving half of the year free to travel and promulgate their ideas. “Such a handbook,” says the preface, “is needed for the many individuals and families, tied to city jobs and dwellings, who yearn to make their dreams of the good life a reality.”

A follow up book “by that frugal housewife” Helen Nearing, *Simple Food for the Good Life*, includes recipes and a description of the kind of food they grew and ate, such as “Casseroled Carrots” and “Buckwheat Crunchies.” Their writings were important to people interested in getting back to the land in the 60s and 70s, and the Fortners were among them, although they did not embrace this lifestyle so completely until their daughter grew up and they left the book business.

The Fortners did much of the work themselves in building their present house, with its view across a small pond to a natural stream, backed by hundred-year-old Douglas firs. Every time I go over there, it seems, a new structure has appeared. At the last Christmas in the Country, a wood-fired oven had been added, in a cute little shingled building covered in tiny Christmas lights. A florist was exhibiting in there, and I worried for the first time that Sweetlife Farm was beginning to resemble those commercial gardens that rely as much on tourists as on regular customers. Was this a proprietary feeling? If I feel that way, it is because the Fortners have cultivated that feeling in a great many people. I think of the Fortner’s house as the island’s living room. Although this is a small town, it is a big island, the size of Manhattan, and we do not cross paths that often. By providing a place for intentional gathering, either for work or play, the Fortners have strengthened the fabric of our community.

I decided that if there is ever a major emergency, such as the bridge washing away and the ferry service shutting down indefinitely, I will make my way to the Fortner’s. I’m not sure

how they feel about that. But I know that if I showed up under those circumstances, they would put me right to work. I have never seen either of them – Nancy, 62, and Bob, 70 – compact, energetic people, idle.

I continued to think about these ideas, the what-if's implied by people trying to become independent of the grocery store for their food. I have another friend, Marilyn Holt and her husband Cliff Wind, who run a farm in South Kitsap County. I decide to introduce these people to each other and start asking some of my questions.

On a Thursday morning, Nancy and I followed the directions to Holt Ranch. Bob had already left for a sustainable farming meeting in Port Townsend. Forty-five minutes later, Marilyn and Cliff and their three dogs welcomed us inside, where we gathered around their dining room table. The oilcloth had a rooster design, and Marilyn served strong coffee.

The current farmhouse was built about 1900. It is the second house on the spot, and the third on the property. The first was at the top of a small rise, partly underground. A new house was built when the spring ran dry, but the present location, near a creek, is too wet. Marilyn's great-grandfather, Frederick Walker, bought the farm in 1892 from the homesteaders, Mr. and Mrs. Cooksey.

Cliff retired in October of last year. He had worked for the United States Postal Service since 1977, unable to find a position teaching math and science. He spent two years teaching in Australia, but still couldn't find a teaching job when he returned.

Marilyn worked as a technical writer and became a certified management consultant. From 1999-2000 she was the Chief Financial Officer of an e-book company. She still has a consulting company, Holt Capital – and says she may return to it in a year or two. I know

Marilyn as one of the founders of Clarion West, a science fiction writers workshop, and she has an authoritative air that would make young software developers pay attention.

In late 1998 or early 1999, it became obvious, Marilyn said, that her father needed help with the farm. Her mother had died in 1982, and Marilyn is an only child. When Marilyn took over, she was simply considering which five acres to sell in order to pay for his care. He had Alzheimer's and MRSA – Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, a bacterial infection common in hospitals. The cost for his care was “amazing.”

“I didn't think I'd get it,” she says of the farm.

Marilyn and Cliff have one permanent part-time employee, and last summer hired 16 teenagers part time, between the ages of 14 and 18. Because it is hard labor, a different set of employment rules apply for hiring young people. For example, no one under 16 can drive any of their farm equipment.

“I'm a huge 'right to farm' advocate,” Marilyn says, meaning she opposes regulations that restrict farming close to high density areas. In communities like ours, this can be an issue as urban areas begin to impinge on rural areas, or cities try to conform to the state-wide Growth Management Act, which mandates planning for increased density. It does not look like an issue at Marilyn's farm, which is surrounded by other small farms and houses with a few acres. Still, if someone nearby decided to subdivide their property into lots and build houses, there could be complaints about the odors associated with raising cattle, or the noise of farm equipment.

I asked Marilyn what seeds she had bought for the coming season: Lettuce, broccoli, onions, garlic, beets, and carrots, she says, bok choy, kohlrabi, potatoes, beans, and corn. They plan to put 7 acres in crops, and keep 20 in pasture for the cattle. A lot of the vegetables will be started under plastic.

“We do a lot out of books,” says Cliff.

Marilyn agrees. “The knowledge has been lost. We need to find it in books.”

They consult the books of a farmer in Maine who uses unheated greenhouses. According to the website for Four Season Farm, it is “an experimental market garden in Harborside, Maine, owned and operated by writers Barbara Damrosch and Elliott Coleman. The farm produces vegetables year-round and has become a nationally recognized model of small-scale sustainable agriculture” (Four Season Farm). The photos show clean, spacious greenhouses, with wide rows of orderly vegetables, and enough vertical space to grow corn. It looks like something out of the futuristic movie, *Logan’s Run*, where people live in a domed city, growing food in pristine, hydroponic vats.

Both couples farm full-time. At first, Marilyn and Cliff focused on hay and cattle. About four years ago Holt Ranch became a CSA, or Community Supported Agriculture farm, which means that individual families pay at the beginning of each season to receive a share of produce. Under the name “Abundantly Green,” Holt Ranch begins its CSA season on June 1, and continues through September. This model has grown increasingly popular across the country over the last twenty years. The advantage to farmers is that they receive cash up front. Consumers receive fresh, locally grown produce, forming a relationship with a specific farm and its products. The beef, which is organic but not certified, in order to save on cost, is already gone for the season.

Otherwise, Cliff and Marilyn sell at the Poulsbo Farmer’s Market, and distribute their CSA shares in Poulsbo, Port Orchard, and at the farm. Outside, Cliff and Marilyn show off a bright yellow cart built by her cousin for use at the market. It has bins and drawers that open out to display the vegetables. The farmer’s market is Cliff’s realm. He staffs the market stall during

the season, and distributes the CSA shares, a rotating variety of vegetables as the season progresses, to participating families.

I asked the hypothetical question that sent me on this quest: If there was a food emergency, and I showed up and wanted to work for food, what would they ask me to do?

“We can all do something,” Marilyn said. “Weed. I would expect you to learn how to field dress.” This means, to slaughter an animal and divide the meat into its appropriate parts for consumption. Basic gardening, she said: loosening the soil, harvesting vegetables, seed saving. Marilyn, it turns out, cannot touch the ground: she is allergic to mold, as well as much of the produce that they grow, such as legumes. She described putting a bean into her mouth before having to spit it out as her throat began to swell.

Marilyn’s mother used to read *The Little Red Book: Quotations from Chairman Mao* with her, and tell her to keep the farm for when the Revolution came. This made me wish I could have interviewed Marilyn’s mother.

At 59, and Cliff at 57, Marilyn noted that they are the national average for farmers in the United States. Cliff never expected to end up a farmer. He likes the interaction with CSA shareholders, “interesting folks, doing this for different reasons.” Often, they do not know how to prepare the food.

We pulled on our mud boots and went outside in the drizzle. I was the only one using an umbrella. Marilyn and Cliff showed us the two big greenhouses where they planned to put starts. As I crouched to look inside the long canvas tunnels, I saw that they were set directly on the ground, and full of mud and weeds. They were about four feet tall, and workers would have to crawl or crouch to plant or weed in them. We walked by a large barn, built from a Sears kit

around 1930. It occurred to me that the beautiful weathered planks on the barn are probably worth more than the building itself.

Another outbuilding contained cold storage units for their produce in the summer. This looked relatively new, and Cliff and Marilyn seemed very happy with it. The extra storage will enable them to harvest food for the CSA shares ahead of time and prepare the boxes on the spot. We passed an area full of old tractors and their attachments, the sorts of farm vehicles that preceded combines. The farm is the kind of place my husband would call ‘Implement City’ when we lived in Western Colorado – farmers have no way of disposing of outdated or obsolete equipment, so it usually just rusts in piles around the property.

Cliff, a thin man with a long, graying ponytail, held up a stray kohlrabi from the previous season and, with a wizard’s flourish, did a little presentation on this root vegetable. I saw what a great math and science teacher he would have made. He told us the best way to eat it is steamed, mashed, and served like mashed potatoes. I’ve been to potlucks with Cliff and Marilyn, and Cliff is the one who dares exotic fruits and vegetables.

Farther east towards the pasture, we climbed carefully over an electric fence. The smallest dog had come with us, and had to be lifted over. While we stood and surveyed the property – which runs slightly uphill from west, where a creek borders the property, to east – Marilyn said that, when the land is under cultivation, it can yield \$1,000 worth of produce per acre a week. All I saw was damp pasture where the cattle grazed north of us, mud where we stood. I wondered if, given their overhead, this was sustainable. Granted, Kitsap County in February, most farms are probably fallow. But when I asked Nancy about it later, she said most CSA farmers have their starts in the greenhouse by now.

We walked up a rise to the site of the original farmhouse. The stumps of old hazelnut trees mark the spot, which looks south across open land to dark forest beyond, and is flanked on the east by firs and pines. It's a beautiful setting, and I wondered what it had looked like to Marilyn's great-grandfather when he first laid eyes on it.

I asked Cliff and Marilyn how they envision their farm in 30 years. Will it still be a farm? "I hope so," said Marilyn. "Yes, I see it as still being a farm." Marilyn has faith that, as long as people know how to work the land, there will be sustainable agriculture. On Bainbridge, a farmer named Gerard Bentryn grows wine grapes and talks a lot about *terroir*, a French term for the characteristics of a specific piece of land. Cliff and Marilyn have invested in the *terroir* of Holt Ranch, and believe that specific knowledge can and will be passed on to others.

Driving back to Bainbridge, Nancy explained that the Fortners work their small farm with only one field mower. Nine of the ten acres are in a land trust, to remain undeveloped. In the summers, they hire a man from Mexico named Saúl to mow. With his help, Nancy and Bob converted more of their property to active production, and Saúl will take home half for his family.

"When I leave this house," Nancy has said, "they're going to have to carry me out feet first." They are building a small cottage to move Nancy's parents here from Mississippi. It is hard to say if any of Bob and Nancy's three grown children will continue the business, since the Fortners followed many roads before coming to this place.

I realized that the practical questions I had come with – how many acres, elevations, how many days of sunlight – were not as important as the question I thought might be the most frivolous: if I were desperate, what could I do to earn food? I wasn't thinking of a Cormac McCarthy scenario, like *The Road*, as much as a breakdown in transportation, since almost all of

our food is shipped or trucked in. The most important factor in the equation turns out to be simple labor: The more hours a human being works on a farm, the more it can produce.

“We have not solved the problem of living,” wrote the Nearings. “Far from it. But our experience convinces us that no family group possessing a normal share of vigor, energy, purpose, imagination and determination need to continue to wear the yoke of competitive, acquisitive, predatory culture.”

Marilyn and Cliff, Nancy and Bob have not solved the problem of living. But if they succeed in finding and maintaining the sweet life, we will all benefit. There is always earth. And around here, there is always water. As long as there are people who need to eat, and people who have preserved the knowledge of growing food, we will be willing to work.

To Market, To Market

I decided to follow up on one of the practical aspects of this lifestyle, the main influx of cash into these households.

One June morning I met Susan Vanderwey at the Bainbridge Island Farmers Market. It had been a late, cold season, and the market was only now really rolling. We sat next to a Celtic Band called The Tinker's Dream. There is often live music at the outdoor market, which is frequented by older couples, young couples with kids in strollers, and people of all ages with dogs. All the groups try to be tolerant of each other. The vendors put up open-sided tents, like party pavilions, facing two grassy walkways in rows, the tents down the center back-to-back. Between the dog leashes and the strollers, it can be difficult to place your feet and make your way to the stands where farmers hand out samples of honey and cheese and chat up the beauty of their vegetables. Cost is always in round numbers, and except for jewelry and value-added items, people always pay in cash. A couple of vendors offer plates of Vietnamese or Mexican food, and that irresistible smell of food cooking in grease fills the air.

Susan, a small woman in her early 60s, seemed to be hard of hearing, but watched my lips as I spoke, mouthing my words along with me. That day, she was promoting a Father's Day drawing, good for a coupon for produce from one of the vendors. I asked how she got this job.

"I have a background in marketing," she said carefully, almost a recitation. "I am a member of the Kitsap County Food Alliance, and was co-editor of the *Farm Gazette* for three years. I live on Bainbridge, and this is my seventh year as manager. My predecessor stayed two weeks."

Why did the previous manager last only two weeks? I asked.

“People have certain expectations of what the market is. People see only the surface. There are occasional conflicts, especially with a lot of entrepreneurs. Part of the job is to resolve those, both during market hours and in general.

“The kinds of conflicts I deal with include, somebody’s tent is over too far, and they can’t get their truck in. Someone is selling something too much like theirs. Then there’s parking: Everyone unloading and parking at the same time. There are times this job just makes me so happy I could elevate. Other times, I go home and go straight to bed.”

Nancy Fortner had, at one point, taken a more active role at the market, serving on the board. But she found the politics difficult, and decided to step back. “Now, I just set up, sell my stuff and go home,” she told me later.

“Unlike many other markets, we do not charge a percent of sales,” Susan said. “We charge for a membership at the beginning of the year, and a booth fee. A limited membership is \$25, and a voting membership is \$50. There are 40 booths, costing \$25 each, or \$28 for a corner booth. The most prominent booths, the front corners, are \$53 each. The board sets the rates. Today, there are about fifteen produce venders, and eight others. There are ten value-added (processed) food venders, three garden (live plant) venders, and fourteen people selling non-food gift items. Some venders have more than one booth, or share. The market has about sixty venders over the course of the season.

“Each week, venders give an anonymous report of how much was earned in each of those categories. This report is required by the Washington State Farmers’ Market Association.

“Growers,” she said, “must come from the North Kitsap School District or from Bainbridge Island. Venders of all other products must come from Bainbridge Island. There are a couple of contract venders who have been invited. They don’t fit within the geographic

boundaries, but have food we cannot get within our boundaries, mostly meat and fish producers. An example is a new vender, Walker Mountain Meadows, from Quilcene. They bring salmon and halibut from Alaska.”

Marilyn and Cliff have applied three times to sell at the Bainbridge Farmers Market. They live outside of the boundary, but were invited to join the last time, and were still turned down by the board. They don’t plan to apply again.

There is a rule of two at the market: no more than two venders can sell the same thing. One artist sells glass and jewelry. Another glass artist also sells jewelry. If there are four selling jewelry, “I have to check to make sure it is okay” with the others, Susan said.

All new products are juried in by a committee of three. There is one expert who reviews value-added food. This must be who reviews any new product Nancy Fortner brings from Sweet Life Farm. She has a well-placed, corner location to our left where lots of foot traffic passes. She’s usually too busy to chat when we visit the market for our own food. Booth placement seems pretty steady during a season, but can change from year to year.

“The meat producers are organic, and so must have their own certification. The Washington State Department of Agriculture took over other products, which had become extremely complicated and expensive for us. All other products are made in commercial kitchens which must be inspected,” Susan said. I remember when Nancy decided to get her kitchen certified. It was a lot of work, and a lot of expense. Sometimes, people who process foods to sell rent commercial kitchens that are certified in order to produce a batch of, say, spaghetti sauce or preserves for the season.

“People come up to me each week and ask, ‘How do I become a vender?’ I ask them, What do you want to sell? They see the social aspect of it and think, ‘I can do that!’” I have

heard this from people too, that they might start a garden and sell at the farmers market, as though growing the vegetables was something that just happened, like Jack carelessly throwing down his beans to grow the beanstalk.

As we talk, vendors come up and ask her questions, or shoppers ask for more information on the market. Susan keeps brochures to hand out.

Susan has never farmed. For ten years she did public relations work for Orvil Redenbacher in Valparaiso, Indiana. He and his partner originally had a farm store. They sold snowmobile clothing, and hybrid seed for another popcorn company. When Redenbacher told them he had a new seed, “they scoffed at him, so he started his own company.” This became the ubiquitous popcorn sold in every supermarket in the United States.

We talked about Brian McWhorter, whose stand for Butler Green Farms occupies the most visible and most expensive booth at the market. It was diagonally across from the tent where Susan spends her Saturday mornings. “He is the most incredibly hard-working man,” she said. “He loans his equipment to others to help them get started.”

I described my carrot obsession, and asked Susan’s opinion on the why the carrots vary so much in taste.

“When food travels, the farther it travels, the more sweetness and moisture it loses. Also, if it is grown with chemicals, not only is it less healthy, but the taste is not as good.

“There is a farmer in Idaho who doesn’t let workers into the fields until three days after he has sprayed. But he only lets his family eat from the organic garden by the house.”

Could we live off of food grown only on Bainbridge Island?

“Not at the present time,” she said. “Not enough land is being farmed. A lot of it is horse farm, or old farms that are a picturesque part of a new estate.”

I asked if it would be possible if all the available acreage were under cultivation.

“I think it’s possible.”

How about in twenty years?

“One can only hope. We are getting more growers, and more restaurants are doing farm to table foods. People say, ‘tomatoes don’t taste the same.’ They don’t because they are bred to travel, unless grown locally from heirloom seeds. Even flowers have changed.

“If it’s organic, food tastes better and is healthier. Organic farmers use the best farming practices.” Everything in the farmers market is organic, she says.

Just then, a new vender came up to Susan. She wanted to know what the best way was to let the other vender’s know about her product. Susan told her to send it to her by e-mail, and she would put it in the newsletter. Each vender has a trash receptacle now, said Susan, because of Susan Landry of Sustainable Bainbridge, a local nonprofit which sponsors a ‘Zero Waste Initiative.’ Then it goes into a city dumpster. Susan and a vender with a booth at the other end of the market, Chris Carroll, are interested in setting up a recycle program.

I ask about all the dogs at the market. Sometimes there are so many, they get into fights.

“There are truly wonderful dogs, and truly wonderful owners. There are a few people who see this as a good way to socialize their dogs. It is not. We ask people to use short leashes, and please be responsible. Quite a few markets bar them.”

I asked how business had been so far that year. “Overall, our sales have been up a couple of percentage points over last year. They are down in crafts, but up overall. This can be a very interesting job. It can also be challenging. At some times of the year, it is more work than you would think possible. The logistical part? Oh boy.”

At this time of year, June, the job takes twenty to twenty five hours a week. In March and April, it takes over forty. In October and November, it also takes over forty. Susan is paid at the same rate year-round. “In January and February we do the reports from the previous year, gearing up for spring. That’s when we book our music groups.”

By now, I had lost my voice trying to be heard over The Tinker’s Dream, which I suspect started out with a different name, and was ready to put some distance between myself and the band. I made my way out between the Corgis, terriers and dogs of more obscure origin, around the baby strollers the size of Volkswagens, and past Brian McWhorter’s well-stocked booth. On a good day, the atmosphere of the Farmers Market is that of a small festival, with music and sometimes entertainment for the children. On a sad day, it rains hard and people stay home with their coffee and newspapers, as fickle as the weather that rules our lives.

Town & Country Market

How did this market business work on a larger scale? The truth is, most of the food at my house comes from Town & Country Market down the street. I make an appointment to see the store director, Rick Pedersen. He leads me from the front of the store to the back, then through a warren of passageways to his overheated office upstairs. Pedersen wears the signature dark-green windbreaker of store employees and a baseball cap. Rick Pedersen is a team player.

Town and Country Market is the flagship store of six supermarkets in the greater Seattle area. Known affectionately by its customers and employees as T & C, it moved to its present location in 1957. It was preceded by two small grocery stores, and the original partners opened what must have seemed like a huge store at the time. It's most famous feature is the signboard on Winslow Way. Originally erected to advertise specials, the owners long ago turned its use over to announce special events, now limited to nonprofits. The lettering of "Town & Country" is close to the "Sahara" type face on my computer. It is hopelessly, unfashionably retro. We all love it.

The store has been expanded a couple of times, but is still – eccentric. There is a main floor and a downstairs, with a stairway in between. Downstairs is a wine cellar and bulk food. Upstairs is the rest of the market, including a delicatessen, a place to drink coffee, and a florist. The store is located on a steep slope, so the upper floor extends out towards the harbor to provide covered parking for about twenty cars. I usually start downstairs with rice crackers, nuts, rice and beans, filling plastic bags and labeling them with the numerical codes that allow the checker to charge me correctly. Employees are constantly refilling the bins, and can answer even the most obscure question about bulk spices and types of dried chiles. I then awkwardly carry my

bags upstairs and dump them in a cart in order to complete my shopping. Above the main floor are the offices.

I asked Pedersen, a soft-spoken man in his early forties, where the other stores were located. They are, in order of opening, Bainbridge, Poulsbo, Ballard, Greenwood, Shoreline, and Mill Creek. Each store has a different character, and caters to its particular clientele. Ballard has become hip and trendy, as shown in online reviews --

All kinds of fun stuff in the bulk section; Mixing the potato salad and egg salad from the salad bar; I'm awash in a large colorful sea of beautiful pornographic produce,

--while Greenwood has older customers. However, said Petersen, there are more commonalities than differences between the stores. Three are neighborhood stores, geared to frequent visits, and the Central Markets are larger stores that draw from a wider area, with customers making bigger purchases. "People have different needs at different times," he said.

The Bainbridge store is a neighborhood store, even if it's a big neighborhood. We drive the extra ten miles to Poulsbo every six weeks or so to purchase groceries that are not available on Bainbridge. Central has an expanded Asian foods section, and a huge fish counter. Women making sushi at a little stand as you shop, readying boxes to be taken away for lunch.

Two or three times a year, I also visit an Asian supermarket in the International District of Seattle. While I am not a gourmet cook, I enjoy experimenting with textures and flavors, and am always looking for food that is both healthy and enjoyable to eat. Years ago, I sent away to an address on a can of Chung King bean sprouts for directions on how to stir fry. That was an exotic concept in Western Colorado, where beef and creamed corn were more likely to be on the menu. Now, I can buy lotus root, long beans, and bitter melon at Uwajimaya, plus tamarind paste, endless varieties of citrus vinegar, and if I want, the latest 'Hello Kitty' products. Tourists

stroll down the aisles, looking at labels they cannot read, while Asian moms haul bags of fresh vegetables to their cars. The produce section is a visual feast of green and yellow and purple, maintained by a local poet. If you OD on food shopping, you can duck into the adjacent Kinokuniya Bookstore and puzzle over racy manga comics or clever t-shirts.

T & C does not have a high enough demand or shelf space to carry all of these items. It must be as many things as possible to its island customer.

I asked Petersen if he grew up expecting to become a grocer. He paused for a minute, adjusting his cap. “Once I knew I was not going to be a professional ball player....” It turns out that his father was a grocer in Ferndale, Washington, north of Seattle. Pedersen first worked in the Shoreline store, then came to the Bainbridge store in 1998. There are between 110 and 140 employees, depending on the season. Fewer than half of them live on Bainbridge, since real estate and rent are expensive here. Pederson lives near Kingston, north and west of Bainbridge and drives about twenty miles each way. He used to commute by ferry to the Shoreline story.

Between two thousand and four thousand customers visit Town & Country each day, spending an average of \$25 each. This includes people who just buy lunch there every day, and day trippers from Seattle who ride the ferry as tourists. I visit about twice a week, and spend between \$30.00 and \$100.00 each time.

Pedersen estimates that, by revenue, about twenty five percent of the food in Town & Country comes from the Northwest. That would extend south to Oregon, and east to Idaho. I later found out that the Northwest designation might extend as far south as Central California for some products. He says that they charge less if it is local, and so must sell more. As a rule, the farther the food comes, the more expensive it is.

“Take wine, for example.” Rick has relaxed a little, and is beginning to speak with confidence. “It’s a big local business now, compared to ten years ago. However, the recent change in the Euro makes it more reasonable to buy imports. It affects how people shop.”

I ask him, if a product is available locally or from somewhere else, how they decide whether or not to carry it. Rick nods.

“First is integrity.” The store must learn all about how and where the product is produced. There is a Director of Food Safety who works on behalf of all six stores. He inspects licensed commercial kitchens, and verifies that organic produce is in fact grown organically.

“We used to buy products out of the trunks of people’s cars,” he said, “but not anymore.”

“Then there is supply.” If a producer cannot consistently and reliably supply a product to the stores, they cannot carry it. Shoppers might like something and want more, but if it is not available, it leads to customer dissatisfaction. I have, in the past, requested items that suddenly disappeared from the shelves, only to be told that they could not carry it consistently. My husband thinks I am a sort of canary in the coal mine for certain products, since that seems to happen fairly frequently. They did, however, begin to carry the enchilada sauce I like, Las Palmas, shortly after we moved here and I requested it. It is still stocked, which means it is readily available from the manufacturer and that other shoppers like it as well.

“Finally, there is distribution.” The corporation must be able to transport the products to its six stores on a regular basis. So supply must be reliable. “Or customers will purchase something, then not be able to get it next time they come in.”

I ask him how many nonfood items they carry. Not many, he says, 10% or less. They earn more, and don’t spoil, but they have a slower turnover. Upstairs, there are health and beauty

products; downstairs, kitchen gifts and cookware. They earn more per inch of shelf space than food, but there is more competition from other stores.

“When I started,” says Pedersen, “you could see over the aisles. The shelves only got taller in the 80s.” They are at least seven feet tall now. Nevertheless, Town & Country is no longer the main supplier of all goods on the island, as other grocery stores, clothing boutiques, stationary and hardware stores have proliferated along with population growth. T & C has narrowed the scope of its nonfood items.

“You can’t buy socks at T & C,” Pedersen says. I can’t tell if he thinks this is good or bad.

I ask how marketing decisions are made, like the use of Big Board Buys, something that started at T & C a couple of years ago. These are often dairy or meat products, perishables that must be moved quickly. “T & C has a corporate staff of marketing specialists,” he said. “They look for the best value, great taste, and price. They look for products that have *umami* – they are at the peak of perfection.”

On my way out of the store, I walked down the ‘personal products’ aisle that included shampoo and cosmetics. There, hanging from hooks at the uppermost part of the shelf, were a couple of pairs of socks for sale.

A few days later, I met Vern and Rick Nakata in a small, upstairs board room across the parking lot from Town & Country, near the Bainbridge Post Office. Glen was late. All three cousins are in their mid to late 50s, and all wore some piece of clothing with the Town & Country logo on it – a vest, a cap, or a shirt, in the khaki or forest green that marks a Town &

Country employee from down the block. The three are first cousins, and they are third generation both on the island and in the grocery business.

T & C is about four blocks from my house, and I often take a midday break from writing to walk into town and pick up a few groceries. Carrying them slowly uphill to my house serves as my exercise. Town & Country owns an important piece of downtown Bainbridge Island. At one point, the owners of Town & Country considered trading land with the Post Office in exchange for adjacent property, so the market could remodel and expand. Those plans are on hold now, and for that I am grateful, since I love the convenience of having both within walking distance of my house.

I asked Vern and Rick if they always thought they would go into the grocery business.

“No,” Rick said. “It just happened, because it was so easy. I was studying electrical engineering, but I had my doubts if I was really qualified to do something with it. I got my degree at the University of Washington, but I stayed here. “

“Rick was my role model,” Vern joked. “We wanted to go to college and get degrees, but we were not motivated to get real jobs. We both went to OCC (Olympic Community College) for two years. I continued at Seattle University and got a degree in math. Like Rick, I didn’t think I could compete to get a job.”

I realized later that they graduated from college during a local recession called the “Boeing Bust,” famously remembered by the billboard someone erected that said ‘Will the last person to leave Seattle please turn out the lights?’

The social element of the store was important, said Vern. It was “just a really happening place in the community, a fun environment.” Their parents and grandparents felt the same way. They have tried to continue that legacy, promoting the social aspects of shopping for food at

Town and County. The store always enters a massive float in the Fourth of July Parade, and regularly hosts quilt raffles, Girl Scout cookie sales, and other events that tie the store to community events. Often, the sign board holds congratulations for athletes in high school competitions.

“In fact,” said Vern, “Glen is probably talking to someone right now. We were encouraged, not restricted, to go into the family business.”

Vern’s title is Point of Sale Manager. Rick’s is Frozen Food Lead. They seem embarrassed by the idea of job titles. Their style of management is collegiality; they are in it together with all the other employees.

“Rick,” Vern said, “takes care of the reader board.” This is, in fact, how I know Rick Nakata, because he has made a point of putting my name on it a couple of times for local events. He always makes sure that I see it, as though I could miss a giant construct of plywood and two-by-fours that dominates the entrance to downtown Winslow. I have to carefully recount to him when I noticed it, if someone had to draw it to my attention or if I noticed it myself. Last time, the neighbor took a photo of it and made it into a refrigerator magnet for me.

I asked if there were any Nakata women involved in management of the store. They mention Susan Allen, who is fourth generation. She is one of the owners, along with Ron, Larry, and Ellen Nakata, a nonvoting member on the board, who has worked in bookkeeping. Karen Nakata is the current Seafood Manager, and Auntie Sa worked at the original meat market. Despite the casual appearance of their style, the management of a grocery business is highly competitive, and calls for a quick and drastic response if any aspect of the business – supply, transportation, distribution, marketing, or competition – changes. Although the board is made up of family members, the decisions they make are crucial to the well-being of thousands of people.

Married couple Mo and Sa Nakata, and Mo's brother John Nakata, were the original founders, in partnership with Ed Loveritch, whose parents had immigrated from the island of Lussin, part of Croatia. Mo's parents, Jitsuzo and Shima, were immigrants from Japan in 1899 and 1906. At the time, Port Blakely Lumber Mill on Bainbridge was the largest in the world, and attracted workers from all over. The Nakatas opened a barbershop, then a bathhouse, followed by a laundry service, all adjacent to each other, and close to where I now live. "Even though they barely spoke English, they anticipated what people would need," Vern said. Deliveries were made by rowboat or horse and buggy.

Mo (Momoichi) was their second son out of ten children, three of whom died early. The children hauled water for the bathhouse. The family struggled financially, and to augment their income, Jitsuzo bought a strawberry farm from another Japanese American family in 1924. A friend's son signed the legal papers, since immigrants were not allowed to own land in the United States at the time.

Ed Loveritch, their childhood friend, picked strawberries alongside the Nakata boys. His parents, Tom and Christina, had purchased the Winslow Dock Grocery Store in 1921. Income for the Nakata family continued to decline with the onset of the Depression, and in 1928, when the family officially took possession of the farm through their oldest son, his father took him aside and encouraged him to ask for a job at the meat market next to the bathhouse. The owner, Charley Bremer, had trouble pronouncing Masaaki, so he changed his name to John. In 1935 John Nakata bought the Eagle Harbor Market from Bremer.

The family managed to persevere through the Depression, and John Nakata paid off the mortgage on the farm through income from the market. This trait – to achieve through patience

and perseverance, is called *gaman* in Japanese, and runs in the family. John Nakata tore down the old bathhouse and barbershop in 1940 to build a new, expanded Eagle Harbor Market. It had a chicken coop in back for their Friday fryer special. Gross sales were about fifty dollars a week.

One year later, on December 7, 1941, the Japanese navy bombed Pearl Harbor. Under President Roosevelt's *Executive Order 9066*, dated February 19, 1942, the Japanese American families on Bainbridge Island were the first in the country sent to internment camps in the interior of the United States. Most of the Nakata family was ordered to Manzanar. Although a variety of families offered help with the business, including the Loverichs, John decided it was best to sell the Eagle Harbor Market. Mo Nakata went into the all-Nisei 442nd Infantry Regiment, where he was wounded and awarded a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart.

On January 2, 1945, the U.S. Government rescinded the exclusion order as unconstitutional. Japanese American families were allowed to return home, but many had lost their businesses. Concerned over lingering racial tensions, Jitsuzo and his family lived for awhile in Moses Lake, Eastern Washington, before returning to Bainbridge. Although they had lost Eagle Harbor Market, the family retained the strawberry farm.

There was little work at the time, so the Nakata brothers and their friend Ed Loveritch wrapped guidelines onto bamboo fishing poles that were sold in Canada. One day, Mo said that they could not do this forever, and proposed that he, John and Ed lease a then-vacant store, the Bainbridge Gardens grocery at the center of the island. John bowed out because he thought there would not be enough business for three partners. Other stores followed, until a group of businessmen decided that Bainbridge needed a supermarket downtown as the area's commercial anchor. They approached Ed and Mo to start that store, and this time John Nakata joined them.

When I moved to Bainbridge in 1995, Mo and Sa's son Don Nakata was running the business. When Don Nakata passed away suddenly while on vacation, his brother Larry was being groomed to take over the company, but it happened a little sooner than expected. Both were older cousins to the three I interviewed. The family realized, at that point, that the margin of profit was extremely thin. Larry made it profitable by reworking the stores to serve a high-end clientele, with complete delicatessen counters, salad bars, and a wide choice of imported goods such as chocolate, olive oil, and wine. A lavishly illustrated corporate history, *Town & Country Markets: nourishing the quality of life* by Russ Banham, tells story after story of customer service through the years, including Ed Loveritch going to Seattle to buy a product requested by a customer.

"In 2000," Glen who had arrived at the interview by then, said, "we were growing too fast. But our core values did not change. It takes a few years to reach a profit stage when opening a big store. We found that the stores we opened in Seattle," and by then, six more stores had opened, "had more competition."

"T & C," Vern added, referring to the original store on Bainbridge, "has always been the little engine that could."

I asked about the local produce connection.

Margaret Clark was "ahead of her time," Vern said. He worked in produce then. Margaret was a sociologist employed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in California who became "disheartened," moved to Bainbridge, and went to work for the market. The eighties were when people got interested in organics. "At the time," Vern said, "we struggled to maintain a corner as organics." She later served on the National Organic Standards Board. Margaret next went to Oregon Tilth, then to Kauai to work for the National Tropical Botanical Garden, where she now

works as the Seed Bank Manager. Margaret is the person who brought Brian McWhorter in. When it was determined that he could meet the three main criteria Rick Pedersen had outlined for me – integrity, supply, and distribution – Brian was contracted to supply organic produce for the store.

I asked what legacy the three cousins had inherited from the founders, Mo and John Nakata, and Ed Loveritch. “We continue in their tradition.” Glen said. “We all worked with them. It’s not any great philosophical thing, just their work ethic.”

There was some discussion at this point because, really, they were all very small when their grandfather Mo Nakata passed away. They may have worked at the store since they were children, but their grandfather died in 1955. Glen, the oldest, was only three years old. But Ed Loveritch was there for a long time after that, a former basketball star at the University of Washington and a flamboyant character.

“Don was a great philosopher,” Glen said about his older cousin. “He took it to the next level in terms of thinking about being sensitive to what the customers needed.” Larry has continued to refine this approach.

I asked what would happen if we were cut off from outside supplies of food. It turns out that few people keep more than a day’s worth of food in their homes, and often shop daily at the market. This surprised me, since we keep about two weeks worth of dry and canned goods at our house. This is not in anticipation of the end of the world, but as an earthquake precaution. The whole area is subject to periodic earthquakes, but a new fault was discovered shortly after we moved to Bainbridge when it delivered a nasty shock to all of us. It made a noise, like an explosion, and I was sure the nuclear submarine base west of here had blown up. A child of the San Andreas Fault in California, even I was rattled.

“Y2K made people talk about emergencies,” Vern said. “We brought in a trailer/tractor rig with extra supplies.”

The store, too, would be out of food within a day if off-island supplies were cut off. I remember being snowed in for three days one December, no power, with my stepdaughters and their husbands, who were big eaters. Everyday my husband and I would put on backpacks and walk to the market to see what supplies had made it through. T & C has emergency generators, but cannot keep all the cold cases going. They were serving fish chowder and other warm treats every day just to use the food. Some families had no way to heat or cook, or even water if their houses were served by a pump and a well, so this was a boon to them.

“We got those things called MREs,” Glen said. “The sodium content was unbelievable.” The cousins glanced at each other before deciding whether or not to tell me this next part. “Service people call them Meals Rejected by Ethiopians.” I had heard this before.

A woman came into Central Market, in Poulsbo, they recalled, and bought \$400 worth of MREs. In March, she wanted to return them. “We could not take them back,” Glen said. The cousins shook their heads. Clearly, canned tuna and boxed macaroni and cheese was the way to go.

I asked if interest in local produce would continue.

“I think so,” said Glen. “We now use signage that says ‘Northwest Produce.’ We are looking into growing strawberries again. It is part of the Nakata family history.” But since the blight, which has stayed in the soil, they are hard to grow on the island.

“We re-established a relationship with the Sakuma family. They were from Bainbridge, but after leaving the camps, they settled in Burlington (Washington), and we buy from them. They also own property in California.

“For over fifty years, we have worked on those relationships: with farmers, distributors, salespeople. At least for these stores, the demand for local produce won’t go away.”

I asked where a specific item, such as tomatoes, came from. Tomatoes on the vine come from California or Mexico, they said. The produce manager always knows.

“By law, we must label Country of Origin.” The tomatoes I buy in winter usually say they were grown in Canada, in hothouses, I’m sure.

“You should also talk to Akio Suyematsu, Brian McWhorter, and Karen Selvar. They are in the murals in the produce section,” Vern said. “I think he’s (Brian) the best farmer on the island, personally. He and I have taught fifth graders at two local schools.”

I asked where the other supermarket on the island fit into the picture. “Safeway serves a different clientele,” Glen said, “looking for price.”

I get my prescriptions filled at Safeway, which opened on the island in 1990, and noticed recently that the Hispanic Foods aisle keeps expanding. Everything is very shiny there, with wide aisles and too much air-conditioning. No one ever approaches you on the floor to ask if you need help. I used to try to shop at both stores to save a little money, but Safeway eventually dropped most of the products that I purchased there, substituting inferior store brands, and my family, on whom all food products should be tested by smart suppliers, objected. But you can buy huge cans of menudo or albondigas soup.

In Poulsbo, Glen said, the same people who go to Safeway on Bainbridge go to Walmart. Just on dairy, it makes a difference to Central Market, which is part of the Town & Country chain. Both sell Darigold Products, so it is easy for them to compare. “Not too many people from the island shop at Walmart. Costco probably has a bigger impact than Walmart on island business.”

Costco is my husband's favorite place to shop, and he will be a hard sell on eating locally or seasonally as long as he can drive another ten miles and get what he likes. We receive a flyer from the store every two weeks or so, and he carefully goes through it to see what's on sale. I usually do not accompany him on these trips. I find standing around on concrete floors to watch overweight people load and purchase pallet-loads of food depressing. Something about the whole process makes me bored and ill at ease. I understand that Walmart is even worse. But I have to agree that the quality and prices at Costco are excellent. Who cares where we buy Kleenex or club soda? They are not manufactured locally anyway. And then it is so easy to pick up, say, some fresh-caught salmon at \$9.99 a pound, or a packaged set of movies recently released on DVD. It's easy to get sucked into the bigger is better and cheaper way of life.

I knew that T & C had instated a 'bring your own bags' policy early on, and still pays five cents per bag you bring in. The Environmental Sustainability Coordinator, they said, is Tony Tenofrio. All of their employees will eventually attend his presentations.

"Now I'm more conscious of environmental things" Rick said, who has attended the half-day presentation, which included a showing of the animated documentary, *The Story of Stuff*.

"Without disrespecting people," Glen said, "it makes you think about it."

The store has experienced between \$160 – 170,000 in savings since starting these practices. They have started a composting program. All green waste is put through a grinder and sent to the Bare Rose Emu Ranch. The emu farm, in turn, sells manure to farmers and gardeners. There was some discussion about whether the store sells or donates its greens to the emu farm, but if someone is raising chickens and asks for scraps, the store provides trimmings if available. The Bloedel Reserve, a famous private garden on the island, recently asked for romaine lettuce to feed the swans.

As for customer education, “We try to give out the facts so people have choices” Vern said. “But we can’t eliminate a lot of the food. We are a store of choice. If people have questions, we answer them or refer them to someone who has the answers. I’m hopeful that things will be better.”

The family has turned over the site of the original Nakata strawberry farm, a couple of miles from downtown, to Brian McWhorter. “Our farm was fallow for so many years. For that reason, it is easier to turn into an organic farm.”

“We attempt to buy products that are non-genetically modified,” Glen said. “But even at T & C, we lose a little of where it comes from. People want to re-establish that trust.”

“My personal goal,” Vern said, “is to grow strawberries again. I want to try to be kind to the earth while maintaining the economic balance.”

“Mine is the same,” Rick said. “We are more than a grocery store.”

“The trust issue,” Glen said. “They know they will get quality stuff. The next generation will stay here, and is used to shopping at our store since they were children with their mothers. The boundary of the island is a big plus for us.”

The social element, added Vern. “Mothers will bring their children in, start chatting. Those elements will still be here.”

“I trust Larry,” Rick said, meaning his cousin who is now CEO of the corporation.

After interviewing the Nakata cousins, I learned the difference between “farm to table,” and “factory organic” from Michael Pollan’s book, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*.

Farm to table is food grown and sold locally, often at farmer’s markets. Most of the Northwest food that is sold at Town & Country, with the exception of the vegetables purchased

from Brian McWhorter, is factory organic. This is food grown on a scale to serve stores like T & C, as well as other chains that specialize in upscale organic products, such as Whole Foods.

I checked the labels of a couple of the products that I buy on a regular basis from Town & Country, and they are definitely factory organic. Pollan describes the growing and harvesting of “organic greens” sold by Earthbound Farms. They are grown in raised beds in California, cut with special machines, and packaged in the fields, using huge refrigerated systems where workers sort the greens and put them into individual containers. When you think about the amount of energy used to produce baby greens on such a scale, the notion of “green” comes into question.

Not too long ago, I bought some organic chicken that was a much better price than usual, which is around eight dollars a pound. I looked and looked to see where it came from, to no avail. Only upon unwrapping it did I find that it came from Iowa. It was about as tasteless as one would expect, frozen for its trip to Washington State. Now I know to look on the very bottom of the package, as well as on the label on top.

Another product I buy, soup by Pacific Natural Foods, comes from Oregon, so that is a little closer to home. Since this is a processed food, sold in rectangular cartons, there is no need for refrigeration in the fields. Still, they must keep up high, consistent, and organic production in order to meet T & C’s criteria, and in order for T & C to make its profit margin at the stores on Bainbridge and in the Puget Sound region.

Every grocery store now carries some ‘organic’ products, usually factory organic. The farmers I talked to on Bainbridge dismiss this type of food as a small step above conventionally grown produce, since it uses so many resources in transportation and preservation. We don’t know the story of this food, only what the label tells us. Factory organic farmers argue,

according to Pollan, that just the number of acres that they remove from conventional farming, with its heavy use of pesticides, is a boon to the environment. Growers of factory organic spend a lot of resources lobbying to keep the definition of organic vague, in order to accommodate the widest range of produce under the label. Recently, Monsanto gained the upper hand with organic retailers like Whole Foods; genetically modified food will not be labeled as such.

A lot of energy is expended to grow foods out of season. If we all learned to eat seasonally, there would not be a market for these foods that are expensive in terms of energy and the environment. No lettuce in the winter, and no tomatoes before mid to late summer. One of the things to be addressed is the notion of preserving food. Nancy Fortner's value-added products include preserves and powdered cocoa in cans, but nothing substantial. This is a big part of the process. When we lived in Western Colorado, I kept a spacious kitchen garden and canned tomatoes, corn, and one or two other things. I didn't mind it then, but it's a lot of time and work. If people are to eat locally, this is a necessary step.

People used to keep fresh and preserved foods in root cellars in order to have food year round. Was I ready for this? We don't have any kind of a cellar.

Farmers Are Always Busy

After my interview with the Nakata cousins, I walked over to Town & Country Market to buy a couple of things. Two of the three cousins went with me. By the time I got to the produce section, Gene was still with me. He showed me the murals high up above the last rack of croutons. I never look up there. Brian McWhorter is in a mural, and Akio Suyematsu, the oldest farmer on the island, who is still farming. We wandered back to the “corner of mysterious vegetables,” as I call it, where they carry a few exotics, Gene talking the whole time about who else I should interview. Then he spotted Brian, and brought him over to meet me.

Brian McWhorter is a mountain of a man. Not only is he tall and broad, but he was covered in dirt. We shook hands. “I hope you don’t mind,” said Gene. “I gave her your cell phone number and said she could call you.”

Brian gave me a nervous, polite smile, and I told him I would call and set up an interview at his convenience. It would only take an hour, I said.

When I reached Brian the following week, he grumbled that farmers are always busy, but agreed to meet me on a Thursday morning at the Day Road Farm, one of the properties he leases both on and off the island to grow organic produce.

Day Road Farm was originally the Suyematsu Farm, started by Akio and his extended family. It is now leased to several farmers and farming concerns. It is protected as open land by the City of Bainbridge. The day was overcast with a slight breeze.

I arrived at 9:00 a.m., and there was no sign of Brian. I did a loop, then parked and got out. A lone person worked in a small plot near the road. I asked in Spanish where Brian was, but he didn’t know.

Ten minutes later, Brian pulled up with three workers, young women, one of them his daughter Kelly. Brian's watch was slow, and the girls chided him for it.

Every time I talked to people about growing food on Bainbridge, they referred me to Brian. "He is the premiere farmer on Bainbridge," said Bob Fortner of Sweetlife Farm. "He probably has the most acreage under cultivation, both on the island and elsewhere in Kitsap County."

Brian began to direct his helpers to move a pile of compost from in front of the greenhouse. They also began loading flats of starts to be taken to a property at Weaver and Wyatt, the site of the original Nakata Farm, now called Middlefield Farm by the family, a translation of Nakata. As far as I know, everyone else still calls it the Nakata farm or property, since it has lain fallow for most of living memory. But then, this is the sort of place where people give driving directions according to landmarks that no longer exist. The starts were for sunflowers, greens, and squash. I asked if the sunflowers were for seeds or flowers. Flowers, he said.

Brian greeted the worker in the small plot in Spanish and introduced him to me as Nacho. They proceeded to have a discussion in English about arugula. Brian directed the women to spread the compost and Rototill it.

We entered the large greenhouse, full of neat rows of starts, and sat down, I in a chair, Brian sideways in a wood-sided Gardenway cart. At first, Brian was taciturn and a bit guarded, but then he opened up.

Brian grew up on a small family farm in Pennsylvania, "where Washington crossed the Delaware. I loved it." Brian was an orphan from Ireland adopted by an American family. He always liked the outdoors. Upon returning from Viet Nam in the early 70s, he moved to Oregon

to attend the University of Oregon, where he studied pre-med on the GI Bill. He always enjoyed gardening. In 1974 he built a house on an organic farm and became one of the first organic farmers.

After graduation, he was broke and wanted to teach, but there were no jobs. He moved to a commune and lived there for four or five years. That is when he started Butler Green Organics with brothers Dave and Tom Lively. They produced \$50 million of organic vegetables before teaming up with a broker who made a connection with organic fruit growers, Joe Gabriel. Then a big company bought the business.

1984 was a bad year for farming, so he and his partner, Amy, went to Hawaii. Brian “just relaxed,” while Amy worked as a nurse in Honolulu. Eventually, Brian leased some property and started a “beautiful farm” in Kona. The couple returned to Oregon to marry. On the way, they intended to visit friends in Federal Way who had offered Brian a job in the solar energy business. They stopped on Bainbridge to camp, and Brian ended up renting a farm on Lovgren Road. Their first daughter, Alana, was born at this time. They began to live six months a year in Hawaii, and six on Bainbridge. That was 26 years ago.

That is when Brian met Margaret Clark, who helped forge a partnership with Town & Country Market. Brian became affiliated with the local farmers market. “A handful of people sold in front of Bainbridge Bakers at that time.” The market moved around to a couple of different venues before coming to rest on the green between the Playhouse and City Hall in a space built specifically for that purpose.

In Hawaii, Brian had grown tropical fruit on four acres. More recently, he bought four acres in Nayarit, Mexico, with a Mexican partner in Lodemarcos, near the tourist town of

Sayulita. He said there are lots of *gringos* and Canadians who have formed an organization called *Amigos de Lodemarcos*. Here, they would be called Friends of the Farm.

When Kelly, his second daughter was born, they tried to make a living by farming full time on Bainbridge, but were unable to do so. Brian began to work as a chef, which “forged a new connection” for him. He found that chefs feel responsible for what people eat, and are willing to pay more to provide good food. “Some just use the concepts of ‘local’ and ‘organic’ for marketing purposes, but others are really committed.”

What, I ask, grows best here? “This is a maritime climate, the best climate in the world” Brian said. “This is rain forest weather, with 32 – 36” of rain a year on Bainbridge. Everything grows here. But we need warm weather, and it has been cold this spring.”

He grows lettuces, brassiers (broccoli family) beets, carrots, leeks, kales, and chards. He wouldn’t try to grow tomatoes outside, but with greenhouses, it is possible to grow anything that will grow in the continental United States. January is the hardest month, because it might snow in January, February, or March. He uses light tunnels, but greenhouses have the best temperature. It felt warm and snug where we sat, protected from the drizzle.

Today, he is starting a winter garden with kale. “You want things full-grown,” he said, because they don’t grow much in the winter.” The Harbour View Public House, a local pub and restaurant, is trying to promote farming by buying locally. “The trick is how to provide consistency, quality, and dependability,” he said, echoing Rick Pedersen. “Then the restaurants will be willing to support you.” Here, Brian stopped to give some directions concerning a wheelbarrow.

Brian has met farmer Eliot Coleman, author of the books used by Marilyn Holt and Cliff Wind, who I had interviewed earlier. Brian says he has been farming ten years longer than Eliot,

and came to many of the same conclusions on his own. “I don’t read as much as I should,” Brian said, but he has learned through trial and error. “People can read,” he said, “but that doesn’t mean they get it. I’ve seen it, done it, now I’m teaching it.”

Brian said that Akio Suyematsu has gone out of his way to help people get into farming on Bainbridge. He has most of the equipment, and used to fumigate the fields for other farmers. Sakuma Farms has a nursery in California, which is where people had, until recently, been getting their organics, mostly blackberries, strawberries, and blueberries.

“I don’t know what to do on the Nakata property. They (the Nakatas) move slowly. It is the fifth year I have worked with them on the property, and it’s marginal.” It was over-farmed fifty years ago, he said, so he is growing things that do not need much water or nutrition: beans, squash, and sunflowers. “Maybe that is a good place for more greenhouses,” Brian muses out loud. He is producing especially for the store. The economy took a hit last year, so the Nakata family backed out of buying the Post Office in exchange for its property on High School Road.

“The organic produce business has gone up 20% a year for the last twenty years. Now it is a billion dollar business, and big money is moving in” said Brian, meaning the mega companies such as Monsanto and Tyson. “Eventually, all produce might be organic. There is a push on one side to radiate all food. There is another group that reads and understands all the problems, and is trying to eat right.”

I mentioned that one of the factors in my interest in food has been my own health, which took a turn for the worse ten years ago. “I’ve dropped 30 pounds,” Brian said. He would not tell his age, but he had a “big” birthday coming up. Brian had celebrated the night before with his friend Mario Perez, who sells fishing nets all over the Spanish-speaking world. This turns out to be his farming partner in Mexico, and the man toiling out front is his brother. Nacho has worked

for Brian for thirteen or fourteen years. They are from a town outside of San Blas, which is called ‘The Golden Valley.’ It is an area between five and ten miles inland from the coast, a good growing area. Brian would like to start an orchard there.

Given the details of his life, Brian was probably turning sixty, but looked younger. He discussed the merits of pure agave tequila, which is what he used to celebrate the night before. He has “surrounded himself with foodies.” Brian thinks that Obama should have ended the war in Iraq and put people to work. “We can do isolationism, but we are fearful our economy will crash if we spend as much on oil as the rest of the world.”

Butler Green Farms serves two hundred CSA families. They now provide “animal protein”: pigs, cows, lambs, chickens. “The thing that is tough on Bainbridge is grains.” The commune in Oregon grew everything it needed, Brian said, and only traded labor for cooking oil and kerosene.

“There is too much variety, choice in the stores,” he said. I asked if the island could grow enough food to feed its population of 21,000. He started doing some calculations based on how much acreage, how many people. He figured he could probably raise food for 1,000 people. 200 families could live on the produce of 3 acres, if they grew things that could be stored, such as corn and beans. On the commune, they traded for prunes, wheat, and filberts. They were able to grow corn and beans.

“Yes, it would be possible to sustain Bainbridge,” he decided.

Brian realized that our hour was drawing to a close, and that he had a few more points to make. “There are now some farmers from off the territory” [Bainbridge] selling at the Farmers Market. At times, he said, it has been too political. “Every other person on the island is a lawyer.” But people want to engage.

“We need to help the generations to come, leave a legacy.” But as a result of having to be more public, “sometimes I have anxiety attacks, especially when people don’t seem to get it.” Brian has appeared on a live radio show sponsored by the Kitsap County Agricultural Alliance on Saturday mornings out of Port Orchard. That is the first live radio he has done. It must have been successful, because he seemed to look forward to doing more.

“But there are lots of young kids who do seem to get it. It’s really a cool thing. I am getting back to where I wanted to teach. I wanted to be a biology teacher, maybe math. This spring, I worked with some kids at Wilkes Elementary School.” They grew starts and had a plant sale.

“We did some algebra to figure out a farm-related problem. They got it.”

Fresh sheet (from the website for Butler Green Farm)

Produce available now

salad greens, spinach, chard, sugar snap peas, bok choy, broccolini, rapini, broccoli, summer squash, braising greens, purple kohlrabi, romanesca, fresh garlic, salsa, jams and sweet relish, canned tuna, eggs.

A little after 10:00 a.m., Brian took me out in the fields in a golf cart to meet Akio Suyematsu. We left the cart on an unpaved lane and walked down a laser-straight row of raspberry plants about five feet tall. Brian pointed to some tiny weeds as we walked. “Akio would consider that too weedy.”

Akio, 82, is as diminutive as Brian is large, dressed in a baseball cap and a wooly vest against the morning chill, where he worked with a single-pronged hoe to root out weeds. He had misplaced his hearing aids. He said he left them on the dashboard of his truck, but could not find them. Brian said he would look for them, leaving me on purpose with Akio, who would otherwise have insisted that I talk to Brian instead.

“I don’t know anything,” he said on cue. “I have this work to do. Ask Brian.”

But Brian was gone.

The raspberries were Meeker, and the bushes were just about Akio's height. I asked if it would ever be possible to grow strawberries on the island again, once a famous farm product from the area. So famous, in fact, that Queen Victoria was served Bainbridge strawberries when she visited Victoria, British Columbia.

"No," he said, "too many diseases." Akio has been farming all of his life, interrupted only by his time in the internment camps and then the Army during World War II. He intended to return to Bainbridge with his family. According to an article in the *Kitsap Sun*, "That's when the Army got me." Suyematsu was drafted into the all-Japanese-American 442nd regiment, one of the most decorated in the history of the U.S. armed forces.

When Suyematsu headed back to Bainbridge in 1947, he found that few other Japanese-Americans had returned — and even fewer were farming. "Nobody wanted to farm anymore," he said. "How many were there? Something like 230? They were all farmers. Now how many are left?" Suyematsu raised a single finger in answer to his question. "I'm the only one stupid enough to keep farming," he said. "The rest sold their land for people to build houses. They're all millionaires. But I don't want houses here. I want it the way it is."

Suyematsu sold his 15-acre Day Road farm to the City of Bainbridge Island, which agreed to preserve the property as farmland after he retires or dies. Until then, Suyematsu grows raspberries for his farm stand, Town & Country Market, and for Bainbridge Winery to make into an annual wine.

I asked him if the soil was good. He could not hear me. From experience with my father, I know that I sound like a mosquito to older men without their hearing aids. I reached down and

picked up a handful of rich dirt, and asked if it was any good. I knew he would talk to me about the dirt itself. Everything else was too abstract, too distant without sound.

“No,” he said. “Bainbridge has terrible soil. But I have been amending *this* soil for years. Every year, after the harvest is in, I put down a layer of goat manure, then this much (he showed me about four inches with his hands) compost.” North of the field where we stood was a compost pile about fifteen feet high. Down the lane a man was working with a weed eater, which did not help our communication.

I asked Akio if it would be possible to grow enough food on Bainbridge to feed its population of 25,000.

After a moment’s thought, he said yes. “We cannot grow wheat, but we can grow corn.” The chill, overcast morning did not seem to bother him at all.

I said thank you and goodbye, and made my way down the row, dark soil studded with tiny rocks. At home, on a fresh sheet from Town and Country Market, I find

Variety Berries show up in July and run well into August. These specialty varieties include nectaberries, tay berries, logan berries, gooseberries, currants, black raspberries, late red raspberries, and late gold raspberries.

Late gold raspberries. That must be how the Meeker raspberries appear on the shelves. I would look for them when I returned.

Spring was just beginning to assert itself on Bainbridge; it was summer everywhere else. At the end of that week, I left for San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico.

The Perfect Carrot

The summer of 2009 I lived in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico where I rented a small condominium with a kitchen. The furnishings were basic, and I ate simply when at home, mostly breakfasts and salads.

The stores are clustered by type along the narrow, cobble-stone streets of San Miguel – pharmacies on Insurgentes, clothing stores on El Reloj, and produce stores on Mesones. One day, I bought some carrots. I didn't eat them for a couple of days. Then I washed and peeled them, although at home I probably would have left the peels on. Hungry, I cut one into rough chunks and took a bite.

This was my Proustian moment, the madeleine of my vegetable experience. I don't think of myself as a carrot fan in particular. I do like most vegetables, raw or slightly cooked. If anything, I favor dark greens – broccoli, kale, spinach, even brussels sprouts. But the flavor of this carrot was overwhelmingly good. There wasn't a hint of bitterness. It was rich and clean tasting. The texture was crisp and tender at the same time. I sliced it up and ate it with sliced tomatoes and lime juice. That carrot tasted of the essence of the color orange.

I bragged to my Facebook friends, some of whom are foodies, and most of whom just like good food. Who doesn't? I made some of them so hungry they had to leave their computers and go have snacks, called *antojitos* in Spanish. Then I forgot about it.

A couple of months later, back at my home on Bainbridge Island, I remembered those carrots. I buy both regular and organic foods at our grocery store, depending on the price, the appearance of freshness, and my level of virtuous feeling that day. I looked for a fresh-looking bunch of organic carrots and took them home.

Later, I washed and sliced a carrot. I took a bite and waited for that special flavor to revive my memories of sunny San Miguel. Instead, my mouth was flooded with bitterness. This can't be right, I thought. I took more bites. Still bitter, as well as tough. I finished the carrot because I don't waste food, and eventually the bunch, although I probably cooked most of them. I was hugely disappointed, especially when subsequent carrots yielded similar results. What was wrong with them? What was wrong with me? And who really cares about carrots, anyway?

An additional wrinkle to this story is that, about two years prior, I had lost most of my sense of taste. I assumed it was temporary, and waited for it to return. When it did not, I mentioned it to my doctor, who insisted on a Magnetic Resonance Image of my head. She wanted to make sure I didn't have a brain tumor, or a lingering sinus infection, or some other malady. The twenty minutes of metal-pounding-metal of the MRI yielded nothing but a temporary headache. My brain was fine, only my taste buds had taken a hike.

I could taste in a very general way, as though my sensory nerves were remotely describing things to me through a headset. All subtleties were lost. This extended to my sense of smell as well. This absence persists to this day.

So you can see why I got so excited about this carrot. The channels were open and clear. The message was "delicious".

What did I know about carrots? Not too much. They are orange, although I have seen them in different colors. It is possible to grow them in North America. We call redheads "carrot tops." Oh yes: and that they are supposed to be good for your eyesight.

According to The Carrot Museum (of course there is a carrot museum), "carrots originated in present day Afghanistan about 5000 years ago, probably originally as a purple or yellow root.... Nature then took a hand and produced mutants and natural hybrids, crossing both

with cultivated and wild varieties. ... Purple carrots were then taken westwards where it is thought yellow mutants and wild forms crossed to produce orange. Finally some motivated Dutch growers took these mutant orange carrots under their horticultural wings and developed them to be sweeter and more practical” (The Carrot Museum)

The wild carrot and the domestic carrot are not the same species, but the wild carrot has been used for approximately 10,000 years for medicinal purposes. Naturally, because of their shape, they have often been prescribed as an aphrodisiac. Carrots were cultivated in Europe by the 13th century, with many doctors prescribing them for ailments as varied as syphilis and animal bites.

This brings us back to eyesight, and an interesting story. Few vegetables have much vitamin A in them. You can get Vitamin A from some animal products such as fish and liver, but not from veggies, except for yellow vegetables and fruit. They are yellow because of colored chemicals called "carotenes" - as are the feathers of canaries and the shells of lobsters. When you eat yellow vegetables, your liver converts the carotenes to Vitamin A.

Vitamin A promotes healthy skin, a healthy immune system – and good vision. This was the basis of a rumor started by the Royal Air Force.

In the Battle of Britain, 1940, the British fighter pilot, John Cunningham, became the first person to shoot down an enemy plane with the help of radar. His nickname was "Cat's Eyes." The RAF put out the story in the British newspapers that he and his fellow night pilots owed their exceptional night vision to carrots. People believed this to the extent that they started growing and eating more carrots, so that they could get around more easily at night during the compulsory blackouts during WW II.

This story was invented by the RAF to hide their use of radar, which was what really located the Luftwaffe bombers at night - not human carrot-assisted super-vision. The German Air Force, in spite of the obvious radar towers on the English coast, fell for this story because this myth, that carrots would make their eyes better, already existed in German folklore.

Back on Bainbridge Island, I described my carrot moment in Mexico to a couple of local farmers. Why were the carrots there so sweet, sweet and tender enough to cut up and eat raw with tomatoes and lime juice? Cliff Wind and Marilyn Holt of Holt Ranch explained that vegetables bought in grocery stores in the United States must withstand shipping, and the carrots I ate in Mexico were probably cultivated for local consumption. In order to grow a carrot that will survive shipping, sugars are pulled from the inside to create cellulose in the outer wall. This is true of most U.S. vegetables.

This is one of the problems with patented seeds, they said. Organic produce certifiers give farmers a hard time unless they use seeds from certain companies, which may not produce the tastiest produce. Earth Company and Seed Foods are two of these companies, and if you trace their ownership, said Marilyn, they go back to the same companies, like Monsanto, that have put a big emphasis on patenting and monopolizing seed sources.

This is supported by Barbara Kingsolver in her book, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*: “Most standard vegetable varieties sold in stores have been bred for uniform appearance, mechanized harvest, convenience of packing... and a tolerance for hard travel. None of these can be mistaken, in practice, for actual flavor.” (Kingsolver)

I also told this story to farmer Brian McWhorter.

He does not always use organic seed, he said. If he finds a seed of equal quality, he can petition his inspector for an exception. “Cold can affect the taste,” he said. He suggested the Napoli as a carrot I might like suitable for this climate.

After my interview with Brian, I went home and looked at the “Fresh List” posted on the website for Butler Green Farms. This was in June, and there were no carrots yet.

Online, I found an article by Kristen Corselius of the Rodale Institute. Bred to be mechanically harvested and to store for long periods, Corselius says the average carrot travels 1,774 miles to our dinner plates. “It’s no wonder that ‘flavorful’ is a word rarely associated with this woody root crop,” she says. “‘Average’ is more like it” (Corselius). According to the USDA, carrots are the fifth most consumed vegetable in the country; the average American consumed 9.5 pounds of carrots in 2003. Chances are, at least 7.2 pounds of those carrots came from California.

In her research, Corselius discovered farmer Gary Guthrie, who has made carrots his specialty. According to Guthrie, variety selection, more than anything else, is the key to tasty carrots. Among his favorites are Bolero, Napoli and Nelson, depending on the season. The soil matters, too. “It starts with nice loose organic soils,” says Guthrie. Fortunate to farm on Iowa’s famously fertile, black prairie soils, Guthrie makes every effort to conserve and enhance his soils with green manures, cover crops and long rotations. His farm is close to a college town, which makes it ideally situated for direct marketing.

So there were two votes for the Napoli carrot.

The next summer in San Miguel, I bought two more carrots. I got lost on my way to somewhere else and ended up at the poorest market in town, down by the railroad, which also featured used clothing and cheap, plastic children’s toys. The carrots did not live up to my

expectations. Like a summer romance, these carrots were unable to live up to my glowing memories of the year before. These carrots, admittedly only a peso each, were grown for cash, not for love. My first San Miguel carrots must have been loved.

Still, these lowly carrots were better than the California-grown carrots I had eaten on Bainbridge Island. They were not bitter, but were not bursting with flavor, like that first bunch. A little smaller, a little more crooked, I could taste the rocky soil, turned by hand or by a horse-drawn plow. I had arrived with the first of the summer rains last year, and every bit of soil that could be cultivated was under the plow.

Everywhere I went, I heard conversations about carrots. Was I obsessed? Or were carrots suddenly a hot topic? At Via Organica, a fancy grocery store at the north end of San Miguel, an American woman in a headscarf left in a huff because the carrots were or were not washed, I was not sure which.

Behind me in the café at the library, two women discussed a third who had cut carrots from her diet when she discovered that she was borderline diabetic. Apparently, carrots have sugar in them. But doesn't every food that tastes sweet? Is naturally occurring sugar harmful?

A quick search of websites recommended carrots for diabetics because of their high fiber content. However, one website advised caution at drinking too much carrot juice, because the high glucose content can cause levels in the patient to rise too quickly.

Marketing seemed part of the key to the golden carrot. When I finished interviewing the three Nakata cousins about the grocery store and locally produced food, which the store advocated long before it became a national movement, I told them my carrot story.

They agreed that the taste and quality of produce can vary by quite a bit, and is affected by how fresh it is. “Vegetables are alive after they are harvested, but refrigeration stops that. That is when they begin to lose flavor,” said Rick. He is in charge of the frozen food section.

As we walked out of the conference room, I heard Vern say, “People are looking for that taste, that special something. That is why they overeat. If we could just provide that taste...”

Chateau Poulet

The old farmhouse is filled with art, including Northwest Coast, with a mix of red kilims and Persian carpets on the floor. Next door, a new building was under construction— nouveau rustic? – a style that uses odd shapes, but new materials such as corrugated steel. A giant Maine Coon housecat, Winston, patrolled the living and dining rooms while Linda, dressed for summer in cropped pants and a sleeveless top, spoke on the telephone. She was interrupted by a workman with a question concerning the construction.

Linda and Stephen moved to Bainbridge in 2001, shortly after 9/11, in part because they knew my next-door neighbors, Hilary and Neil. Before, they had lived in the fashionable Seattle neighborhood of Montlake, “noisier, crowded, less fun.”

Stephen grew up in Sacramento, California and was a 4-H kid. “I already think this is where I want to live,” he told Linda, upon first seeing the farmhouse on 2.2 acres with the chicken coop in front. An offer had already been made on the house, but they made a second offer and got it. That was in August.

Meanwhile, 9/11 occurred. They had already arranged to move on that day, but everything was delayed. They moved a week later, and all the ferries blew their horns for one minute in commemoration of the deaths. “I cried,” said Linda. “We haven’t looked back since.”

Did you intend to raise livestock? I asked.

“Not really,” said Linda. “I had a little glimmer of someday living on a farm.” Within a month they had chickens in the coop.

Linda and Stephen also grow all of their own vegetables, and keep bees. They started with three hives last year, and are down to one. The others were lost over the winter. They also had honey the first year, but not since. “Just dead bees,” Linda said. They might have died of

mites, or fungus, but there is no evidence. This is typical of colony collapse disorder, which has affected bee colonies across the country. Just because we are on an island doesn't mean the bees here are immune.

I asked what they do when they travel. "Somebody has to stay here. It's not that big of a job, but it's daily. We live on a septic system and a well. Systems can go bad." The eggs need to be picked up daily, although they have 3-4 days of feed, and the water is automatic.

The sheep also have an automatic water system, as well as grass and some supplemental feed. There are eight sheep right now, to be reduced to three or four when they return from their next trip. I asked Linda if I could come back when they slaughtered the sheep. This seemed to surprise her, but she agreed.

They just acquired a rescue goat, a Nubian named Annie. She will be just a pet, Linda emphasizes, not expected to produce milk or meat.

In with the chickens are six all-white call ducks, a type of miniature mallard. They are used in England, Linda said, to "call in" wild ducks. They are very talkative, and also lay eggs from April to July that can be eaten.

Linda and Stephen started selling eggs five years ago, when they realized they had too many for their own consumption. At first, they sold them out of a cooler at the end of the driveway on an honor system, then half-way up the long drive, and now from the porch of the house, figuring it will take a lot of nerve to come right up to the house and take eggs without paying. "People love them," Linda said, "I've had people follow me up the drive just after I've changed the sign to 'available.' Often."

Linda grew up in Seattle and attended the University of Washington, where she majored in Spanish and French. She taught in the Seattle Public Schools until 1975, when the school levy

failed twice, and all teachers with fewer than ten years of seniority were let go. She also taught evening courses at South Seattle Community College. After seven years, Linda was ready to do something else. With her then-husband, Linda went to Europe for four months.

When she returned, Linda found a former boarding house on Broadway and bought it for \$35,000. “Frame it On Broadway” opened in 1976, and Linda operated the business for 26 years, adding the Linda Meier Gallery upstairs. I remember that business, although I don’t think I ever went inside. This was not my neighborhood when I lived in Seattle, and there were framers closer to my house. I asked if she missed the business. “I don’t!” she said, “Being in retail is like a drug,” she added, “a high when it is doing well, a low when it is not.”

Linda met Stephen Hubbard in 1996 at the gallery, and they were married in 1998. About that time, her accountant said that she could afford to sell the business and retire.

“I knew Sound Transit would go up Broadway,” she said, meaning a massive tunnel system that is now under construction, so she sold. Linda is really glad to not have the business right now. The building was bulldozed a year ago.

Stephen, who was in private practice as a cardiologist at the time, was diagnosed with *idiopathic urticaria* (hives of unknown cause) and needed to take antihistamines to control them. He continued to perform non-invasive surgeries such as implanting pacemakers, stents, and angioplasty until a pharmaceutical representative asked him about it, and he realized he needed to stop. That was 1998. He was hired by Harborview as a teaching physician, which pays one-fourth the salary of a practicing physician. However, his insurance policy made it possible.

“We decided to look around Bainbridge and see what popped up. I had four years left on my mortgage in Montlake.”

I asked how much feed costs for all the animals. It took Linda awhile to estimate, finally coming up with \$250 to \$275 a month. The amount they receive for the eggs “might break even” for chicken feed. “We do it because we love it.”

I asked if there is a philosophy behind this, or if they consider it a hobby. “Both,” Linda said. “The philosophy part of it has grown, with the idea of getting food close at home, and knowing what your animals have been eating, what they have been nourished by.”

When Linda is not travelling, she attends a meditation group with Hilary and one other person I know. It is held on Wednesday evenings in a yurt. I think it is vaguely Buddhist, but I might be wrong. Linda and Hilary first met many years ago at est, a program of the human potential movement in Big Sur, California, popular in the 60s and 70s.

As for practical knowledge, Stephen grew up with some prior knowledge of how to keep and raise livestock. Their friends Tim Bailey and Kitty Garrett began sending them a gift subscription to *Backyard Poultry*. Linda recommends it. Someone else gave them a copy of *Minnie Rose Lovgreen’s Recipe for Raising Chickens*, by Nancy Rekow and her former neighbor, Minnie Lovegreen, an Island classic. Basically, it says, keep your chickens happy – warm, dry, well-fed and watered – and they will lay eggs for you. “Great source,” said Linda. Otherwise, “When chicken farmers get together, they talk about chickens. And sometimes you can’t get them to shut up.”

The two most common questions they are asked, Linda volunteers, are 1) Do you have to have a rooster (no) and 2) How many chickens do you have? (about 30). I remember when they did have a rooster, but he never came out of the coop. He must have died of old age. Chickens live about four years, and Linda and Stephen eat their chickens when they die.

“There is tons of information online,” she adds, and a series of books available through *Backyard Poultry Magazine*. The website also carries books on homesteading, preparing and preserving food, and gardening. In fact, enough books to insulate that little backyard project you’ve been meaning to get around to.

“Chickens are in,” Linda says. A law was passed in August that increases the number of chickens that can be kept in a backyard coop in Seattle. People will be allowed to keep up to eight chickens per house, while roosters are prohibited. The Council allowed a grandfather clause that lets existing roosters remain in the city. The ordinance, which passed unanimously, also paves the way for urban farms and taller greenhouses. Specifically, it will allow:

- Urban farms of up to 4,000 square feet in residential zones. Food grown on site can be sold on site. There are limits on sales hours, amount of farm equipment allowed, and size of signs.
 - Greenhouses dedicated to food production to extend 15 feet above height limits in certain zones.
 -
- "This is something most major cities are talking about," Councilwoman Sally Clark said. "It's exciting for people who want to see community gardens go to the next level."

Linda and Stephen received a call from BITV, our local cable channel, asking about salmonella. This was during the recent case of tainted eggs from a big, Midwestern supplier in which 1300 people were sickened nation-wide. They did not return the call. If asked, Stephen told Linda to say that, “people should consider all raw poultry and all raw eggs to have the potential of salmonella.”

“After all, you have to remember where the eggs come from,” Linda said, meaning, the rear end of a chicken. In the Iowa case, the feed itself was contaminated, so the chickens were sick internally, not just externally contaminated.

The USDA has been trying to document all the chickens in the United States. They sent out a 35 page survey, which Linda and Steve threw away. The USDA also called them about ten times, she said, and came by once. Chateau Poulet does not have a license.

“The reality is,” Linda said, “you can’t control all the chicken farmers in America. There are more and more. The survey was ridiculous.”

This attitude was also indicative of the independent spirit in which Linda and Stephen are raising much of their own food. I ask if they could live off the produce of their property if they had to.

“It’s a possibility,” Linda says. They have three freezers, but do not can. They are learning the best ways to freeze food. They grow more tomatoes than they can eat, and are using them in pastas and soups in the winter. “We go through a lot of zip lock bags.”

I asked Linda what her response would be if there was a food shortage. “The good news is, if there were a food shortage, we have a lot stored away. The bad news is, all our friends and neighbors know it.”

I asked if there was a way I could trade labor for food, if it came to that. It would be a long walk to Linda’s house, if I had to walk, since she lives across the harbor from me. I’m more likely to go to the Fortner’s first.

“Oh man. How do I answer that? If you were friends and family, we would share, on a short term basis. On a long term basis, I don’t know.” She referred to a book called *Into the Forest*, by Jean Hegland. It is a near-future novel that tells the story of two sisters who survive a near future catastrophe, and must fight off people who try to steal their food.

“Right now it’s a joy to share,” Linda said.

I asked if they do any barter. She said that they mostly share, and donated one day's worth of eggs a month as a PAWS auction item. Linda volunteers for PAWS, the Progressive Animal Welfare Society, as well as the public library.

We went outside. The original farmhouse turns out to be a log house built from a kit by the first winners of the Washington State lottery in 1982. The building going up behind it is a garage with a studio apartment on top. Stephen plans to jam with his jazz buddies here. A piano had already been moved in on the few feet of floor that had been laid. Stephen's son, one of five children from a previous marriage, and a carpenter were laying the rest of it. In front of the garage were three 3,000 gallon tanks that will collect water from the roof. There was also an expansive deck with a view north of Eagle Harbor over the treetops, towards the ferry terminal and my house.

Below us, the sheep grazed on the grassy pasture that slopes gently north towards the harbor. "They are Katahdin sheep, no personality. Just sheep." Linda repeated that Annie the goat will be just for fun. Annie was very sociable, and came right up to the fence to visit with us as we strolled down the driveway. The sheep ignored us.

The chicken house has an enclosed mesh run outside of it, so the chickens can go in and out as they please. There were previously two peacocks, which have since died and have not been replaced. The chicken house and run are shaded by a huge fig tree, related to one in my neighborhood. These trees, too, have a story.

I had not been in Linda's vegetable garden before, which lies close to the road in a separate, deer-proof enclosure. It is lush and full of as many flowers as vegetables. Linda showed me where their female Maine Coon, Lionel's companion, was buried under white hydrangeas. Both cats were discovered living in horrendous circumstances with a hoarder, and took months

of nursing to recover. While we were in that part of the yard, she arranged a trade involving tomatoes with the next door neighbor, who came out of his house to see her.

The chickens are winding down now. As the days get shorter, they will produce fewer and fewer eggs. Because we are so far north, the seasonal changes in the length of days is exaggerated, and it takes artificial light if you want your chickens to continue laying through the winter months. Most of the farmers I know let the chickens have a rest. When they need new chickens, they mail order them and have a box of chicks sent to the post office.

Linda seems happy and satisfied with her life. They can afford to keep this small farm and still travel the world, sailing and hiking. Stephen, who has had a couple of health scares, has tried to quit his teaching position at Harborview Medical Center, but each time the hospital convinces him, with shorter hours or higher pay, to stay. Stephen enjoys running Chateau Poulet, and I sense that he would spend more time at home if he could. Like the Fortners, Linda and Stephen seem more interested in self-sufficiency than in any survivalist philosophies, although Linda seems to have thought about it more carefully. A lifestyle tied more closely to the land seems to suit some people, no matter what they did before they returned to it.

Clamming with Neil

Neil threw himself full-length on the muddy sand and grabbed the geoduck by the neck. I carefully watched what he did, because I was sure he planned to make me pull up the next one.

Last winter, Neil and Hilary invited us over to celebrate the New Year. Like most events on the island, this was a potluck. They served an amazing clam chowder that Neil made. It turned out to be geoduck chowder, with lots of pepper. Richer than regular clam chowder, the flavor was meatier, the texture more substantial, a perfect antidote to our dark, damp winters. When Neil sat down next to me on the couch, I complimented him on the soup.

“Doesn’t this make you want to go out and hunt for food?” he asked.

“No...” I answered. Was this a trick question? I’m notorious for my lack of tolerance for cold weather, wet weather, any weather below 80 degrees.

“Don’t you just want to go out and hunt and fish and gather, to stalk your prey and bring it home?”

“Not really,” I answered carefully. “After all, we live next door to you. Why should I hunt and gather when you do such a good job of it?” We even got the occasional chard or zucchini from their garden. Our yard is too shady to grow anything except lavender and a little rosemary.

This did not satisfy Neil. He got up and went across the room, where I heard him ask my husband the same question. And my husband gave him, more or less, the same answer. I’m sure he did not hear our earlier exchange.

But many people, it seems, do feel this way. “There is something primordial about the pursuit of these foods and medicines in their natural habitats,” says ethnobotanist Gary Paul Nabhan. “It is an elixir for the soul, this drinking in of forest and marshland.”

This is the hardest clam to dig. The geoduck (pronounced gooeyduck) has a long, thick neck and so, using its foot, can dig its shell deep into the sand – three to five feet – and extend its siphon up to the surface. I had seen them dug once before, during a low tide at Golden Gardens Park in Seattle. The digger shoveled as quickly as he could, getting in the hole as he went, until he was completely covered in mud, sand and slimy seaweed. Somehow, I didn’t think this was going to happen to me. But I took a towel just in case, and wore two layers of clothes so I could strip one off if I ended up a total mess. Mostly, I just hoped that it didn’t rain while we were out, or I would be too miserable to pay attention.

All year, Neil had bragged about the special place where he found geoduck, someplace no one else dug. He made a mystery of it, but said he was willing to share it with me. Foraging and harvesting wild foods are a big deal around here, so I finally decided to take him up on the offer. When I e-mailed the day before to see what time to meet, he seemed reluctant to go, although he had already instructed me to go to Walmart and get a shellfish license from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Walmart is not that close, so I went online and, sure enough, was able to buy a license for shellfish and seaweed for \$12, and print out a temporary license on the spot. It was good for ten days. There are all these rules around harvesting crabs and shellfish in Washington State, and a lot of disputes about who owns the rights to the tidelands and their product. I guessed that Neil’s secret geoduck stash was on public land if I needed a license. I was right, sort of.

Neil loaded a spade, a bucket, and two pairs of waterproof gloves into his Ford Explorer. Hilary asked me if I had a bucket. I held up two large zip-lock bags, and she said one clam would fit in each. One pair of the SealSkinz gloves, size XXL, was for me. I could probably fit both hands in one glove. Eating a muffin from the Blackbird Bakery as he drove, Neil set out for a city park at the opposite end of the island from our neighborhood. We passed a dead raccoon on the highway.

“Did you know that Stephen stops and picks up road kill?” he asked suddenly.

“I could see doing that with deer,” I answered, “especially if you killed it, or just saw it hit.”

“He eats everything,” said Neil. “Even raccoon.”

I think I made an involuntary sound with a lot of ‘l-l-l-ls in it. I was trying to keep an open mind. Raccoons, like humans, are omnivores, meaning, they eat everything.

It turned out I was familiar with this park, typical for the Northwest: a long steep trail through deep woods that broke out onto the open beach. Because you can’t really see ahead, the end of the forest trail is always a surprise. You feel as though you are in the middle of the woods, then you are standing and blinking at the open sky.

Neil’s parents, he told me as we drove, were commercial farmers, raising poultry and other livestock, as well as growing most of their own vegetables. He viewed high school in Petaluma, California, as a sort of social competition, and felt that, driving in from the country in his pickup truck, he was considered a hick. Barbara Kingsolver, too, in her book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, talks about the acute differentness she felt living outside of town in rural Kentucky, and both seem to wear this as a badge of honor. Having lived in both urban and rural

communities, I hate to tell them, the pecking order among children inside of cities is just as harsh as to those outside

Neil also had a friend whose father owned a small plane, and used to take them out to the coast, near Point Reyes, to harvest shellfish. This is where he learned to stalk and hunt the elusive clams.

There were three kinds of clams we were looking for that day. The forest ranger in Neil, a retired Director of Alaska State Parks, kicked in: the geoduck, the Nuttall's cockle, and the horse clam. By the end of the morning, I would be able to identify all three.

We parked and got out of the car. Neil, who is around 6'2", put on waterproof pants and a bright orange jacket. He and Hilary have a sailboat, and they always look as though they are going sailing to me, even when they come over for dinner. But these were probably special clam-digging clothes.

"Let's see. It's around here somewhere," he said, veering left down the road.

I led Neil in the other direction, where the trailhead was clearly marked. It turned out he had not visited in over a year. The chowder served at New Year's had been made from frozen clam. A weathered sign warned against harvesting butter clams because of PSP, or Paralytic Shellfish Poison. The beaches are almost always closed, said Neil, to the harvest of butter clams, which concentrate toxins from phytoplankton and reach toxic levels faster than other shellfish. As we made our way down the trail, brushed by person-sized ferns under hundred foot or more Douglas firs and hemlocks, Neil regaled me with tales of entire villages in Alaska being wiped out by PSP. Did he think this was tragic? Or amusing? I couldn't tell.

Neil retired to Bainbridge Island with Hilary a couple of years before they bought the house next to ours. They realized that their home on the north end of the island was too large and

remote, so they sold it and moved into town. Hilary works for the National Audubon Society in Washington State, and they travel to places like Mexico and Costa Rica on birding expeditions. In retirement, Neil has taken more responsibility for their meals, keeping a kitchen garden and collecting runoff from the carport to water it.

Out in the woods, Neil was more at ease than in the car. In fact, during the entire outing, Neil was more himself – at home in his skin – than I had ever seen him before. When a winter wren spoke up, Neil explained that its name had been changed to Pacific wren, the other name staying with a bird in the East that had been declared a separate species. He disliked this, and said he planned to continue calling the bird a winter wren. I was relieved to find that the trail had been improved since I visited a couple of years ago, when my husband and I scrambled down the rocks of a small stream to make our way to the beach. I didn't relish doing this while carrying a shovel. Only the last part of the trail was steep, with rough steps down about fifteen feet to beach level.

Upon climbing over a large, fallen log at the end of the trail, we could see the hand-like prints of raccoons on the sand, and a couple of places where they had dug. This far back from the tide line, it was probably not for clams. We walked towards the receding tide, facing a Marine facility across the water at Keyport that tested missiles, Neil said. North and much closer, breaking up the dense green trees, were the white buildings of the Clearwater casino on the Suquamish Reservation, across the bridge that ties us to the rest of the Kitsap Peninsula.

Washington State has few smooth, sand beaches. This is one of them, with a gradual slope going west, and a substantial tide flat that invites marine life to dig in. As we walked out of the woods and closer to the water, the sand took on a rippled surface that held small pockets of brackish water. When seaweed appeared, we began searching for clams.

It was still an hour before low tide. I commented that the tide tables showed the low tide at Port Townsend as substantially earlier than at Elliott Bay in Seattle. I had remembered to check the newspaper. Life in the Northwest is so dependent on the tides, that the check-out stands at grocery stores have booklets with the tide charts for sale, along with gum and other ‘point of purchase’ items. Bainbridge is about half-way between Port Townsend and Seattle. Neil said that the tides in Port Townsend, north and west of us, were about fifty minutes earlier. The optimum level for digging geoducks is at least a minus 1.5 foot tide. Today was a minus 1.1, which meant the clams would be close to the water’s edge even at the lowest point.

Neil paused at what appeared to be a small pile of gravel on the surface. Bending over, he pinched it, and a small stream of water shot upward before the protuberance slowly withdrew. This was the siphon of a geoduck, and Neil was pleased to find it. He wanted to wait until low tide before making any serious investment in digging. We picked up a couple of the Nuttall’s cockles, which he prized for their ease in harvesting, since they hardly bury their shells, but provide plenty of meat. He also picked up a couple of long, dark-red oval shells that I said resembled mussels, except they were so large, but he said they were a type of clam.

We wandered north along the shore, crossing the outlets of small streams that drain the cliffs above, into an area that fronts on large, expensive houses. Two men in their sixties or seventies emerged onto one of the docks and one called “Good Morning!” Neil answered him, but I don’t think he heard. I wondered if they considered this their property. A long history of litigation simmers in this state over ownership of these lands. It has been settled that private land ends at the midpoint between high tide and low tide, with Native Americans having the right to harvest shellfish on all the tideland properties. This was spelled out in the treaties, but took a landmark decision in 1974 by Federal District Judge George Boldt and years of litigation to re-

establish this right. Still, on Bainbridge, private owners go out of their way to hide public beach accesses designated by the city, even gating and padlocking them and posting ‘No Trespassing’ signs.

The end of the dock was well above and away from the low tide, so the two men had to drag their small, inflatable dinghy to the water. Again, the first man called “Good Morning!” a little more belligerently, and I answered him. He was making sure we knew he had seen us. I realized why Neil made sure we had licenses, in case we were confronted by people like this. The two men paddled out to a small sailboat anchored offshore and sailed away. In Oregon, no one owns the beaches, and I wish that was the case here.

Finally Neil found a geoduck he liked. I’m not sure what he was gauging, probably size, depth, and distance from the tide line, but how he could tell the first two from the surface, I didn’t know. Starting a couple of feet from the spout, he began to dig rapidly, circling the clam as he threw sand behind himself. The clam spouted water and withdrew its siphon farther into the sand as more and more of the neck was exposed. The first time I had watched this, I thought the clam was digging itself farther into the sand, and would get away.

Not true, Neil said later. The clam is not going anywhere. The need for haste is because the hole immediately begins to fill with water, and then collapses. When the hole was over three feet deep, he set his shovel aside and threw himself full-length upon the sand, reached down into the excavation, and grabbed the geoduck by the neck. The trick is to extract the neck and the shell at the bottom. If you sever the neck, you cannot legally keep it. Otherwise, it would be too easy to cut off the necks and leave the maimed geoducks to die deep in the sand. Pulling mightily, Neil was able to bring up the shell. The neck was about a foot long, and the shell, brown and roughly oval, about six inches.

Commercially farmed in parts of Puget Sound, the geoduck is a valuable animal. Highly prized for its tasty meat, it sells for \$100 a pound in the Tokyo fish market. Seattle's own sushi houses serve the pale, slightly yellow flesh sliced in overlapping ovals that can be picked up with chopsticks, dipped in sauce, and nibbled. Richer than most clams, it makes a fan of most shellfish lovers. I first tasted it in a Japanese restaurant in the University district of Seattle. The texture is firm but not too firm, smooth and consistent, with a clam flavor that is surprisingly light for such a large shellfish. Even in the Puget Sound region, where they are commercially farmed, geoduck is expensive in a restaurant.

Geoducks are also a favorite seafood display at the Pike Market in Seattle, a major tourist destination. The young, almost always male fishmongers throw fish at each other and sometimes pull an especially vicious-looking fish, like a monkfish, across the table by a string to scare children. The geoducks are often surrounded by tittering teenage girls, or their mothers, because of their resemblance to a human male member. In the bucket, they just looked like really sad clams.

Neil was visibly tired from the effort. I filled in the hole, mostly for aesthetic reasons. Later I learned that it is required, although the tide would soon even out the beach.

Neil remarked that the Native Americans say that the clams offer themselves to us, that they give of themselves for us to eat, yet they are so hard to dig. Well, I said, they are available to us, even if they don't like it. There is a saying around here, 'When the tide is out, the table is set.'

The next geoduck we found, I dug part of the hole, but it was too close to the water, and the sand began to collapse as we dug. Each geoduck seemed to be surrounded by lots of big, tough butter clam shells, mostly empty, that made it difficult to dig. The combination of silt, sand

and water created a slurry as heavy as wet cement. I could barely lift each small shovelful, although I tried not to show it. As it was, I expected to pay in back pain for this outing. No wonder Neil was tired after digging the first hole so quickly. Another dig also resulted in failure, so we began to wander back the way we had come.

Neil showed me a different siphon, delicate and lip-like compared to the geoduck. This was a horse clam, and although large, it did not bury itself as deeply, and was easier to retrieve. These also make good eating, but are not prized like the geoduck. Horse clams are tougher, less delicate in flavor than geoducks, and some diggers keep them solely as bait for crab traps.

I have a rule that people talking to their food leads to trouble, and by the time we were back on park lands, Neil was talking to the clams as we examined each siphon. The Fortners bought a turkey chick to raise for Thanksgiving two years ago, and named her Turkey Girl, or TK. She roosted with the laying hens and was the first to call out to them each morning. When the day came to slaughter her, they couldn't do it, and had to give her away to grace someone else's table. By then, said Nancy, she was eating too much anyway.

Neil noted the neat holes drilled in many of the white butter clam shells littering the beach. These were made with radula, small, circular saws that the giant moon snails and razor clams, both predators, use to gain entry. They suck the other shellfish out of their shells. I looked back and saw that a seagull was feasting at one of the holes we had dug, eating the damaged butter clams left behind. Nothing went to waste in this ecosystem.

Finally, we came across a geoduck that had several inches of neck sticking out. On the chance that it was not buried as deeply as the others, he began to dig. Sure enough, the clam, a young geoduck, came up easily. I walked out into the shallows and rinsed it, as Neil had done with the others. The long neck was rough like a callused hand. It was rigid when I picked it up,

but seemed to relax as I carried it. Otherwise, there was no movement. I could not tell if it was dead or alive.

By now, Neil was dripping sweat. He walked up and down the beach trying to catch his breath. I could see why he was reluctant at the last minute to go clamming: It's a lot of work. Neil had been too much of a gentleman to make me lie down on the wet sand and pull out a clam, or even dig that much, so I still felt pretty good. It was a perfect morning for being on a Northwest beach – overcast, but no wind or rain. For once, I was just right outdoors.

We examined a few more spouts, but most of the remaining clams were located in heavy, wet sand that would have been difficult to dig. By now, Neil was considering names for each clam we looked at, and it was time to leave. We had about six large shellfish, and I was perfectly happy. I hoped to create something like Neil's chowder from earlier that year. His mother, he said, used to grind the clams, mix the meat with sweet onions, and fry them as patties.

Once the clams are rinsed, he said, you remove most of the shell and plunge them in boiling water for a few minutes. Then you trim off the end of the siphon and strip back the rough skin.

At home, we showed off the shellfish assortment on the lawn to my husband and another neighbor. I think this was an important part of the ritual for Neil, the hunter displaying his trophy. We hosed them off along with Neil's jacket and my boots. Neil said he would take the clams home and clean them, and a couple of hours later he returned, showered and in clean clothes, with a four pound bowl of ground clam meat. He decided that the mussel-like shellfish probably were a type of mussel, maybe an invasive species, and left them out of the mix until he could identify them. They turned out to be the Northern Horse Mussel, *Modiolus modiolus*, mostly used as bait.

The mix of geoduck and horse clam meat was white and almost fluffy, it was so light. I could not tell the two types apart. The good thing about clam meat is that although it has a distinct flavor, it compliments many other flavors. You can make it with a red (tomato) or white (milk) base, and include all of the winter vegetables you would add to any winter stew. I gave Neil back at least a pound to use before he and Hilary left for an extended sailing trip up the east side of Vancouver Island. The rest became chowder in my kitchen, some of it right then, and some in the freezer, waiting for the New Year.

Could I dig clams by myself if I had to? I think so. I would probably leave the geoducks to the strong and the hardy, and concentrate on the lesser clams in the vicinity. But I doubt that they would last long if everyone on the island was digging for them. Clams are probably not a long-term local food solution, although it is part of most people's diets. I suppose it's healthy, at least where we were digging them on the northwest side of the island.

Closer to our homes, that's doubtful. Eagle Harbor is the location of the Wycoff-Eagle Harbor Superfund Site, contaminated by decades of creosote used to waterproof logs for ship-building. After years of mitigation, in which a combination of federal agencies have worked to cap and contain the creosote at the bottom of the harbor, there is still a sheen on the water that seeps from the hidden petrochemicals. After everything we have done to this island, our food supplies from the waters around it will be affected for years to come. In order to live off the land on Bainbridge Island, we would have to turn back to the professional earth, water and sun managers, the farmers.

Mora

Our cat disappeared last week. This is not uncommon on Bainbridge Island, a few miles west of Seattle, but Pearl had lived with us for over fourteen years. She was a rescue cat from the county, and we figured her combination of caution and her ability to climb trees quickly had kept her safe.

Just north of our neighborhood is a deep, wooded ravine that runs under the nearby highway to join a salmon stream. Just south are five acres of open land, privately owned. When I say open, I don't mean empty. The land is dense with salal, wild blackberries, and scrub trees. Our neighborhood, on a dead-end street, serves as a wildlife corridor between the two areas, one of the reasons we love it. On a regular basis, the neighbors sign petitions, write letters, and attend city council meetings to protect the Cave Avenue neighborhood from the encroachment of developers.

I waited a couple of days for the cat to turn up. After all, she is an indoor-outdoor cat, and although she tends to stick close to home, she is entitled to a little adventure. Only on the third day did I put up 'Have You Seen Pearl?' posters around the neighborhood, feeling both worried and foolish. Maybe she was in somebody's garage.

It is the season for blackberries, and the bushes are especially prickly during this time, as though to give up the purple/black fruit to only the most worthy seekers. Right now deer, songbirds, crows, blue jays, raccoons, and yes, rats are feasting on the fruit. There is so much that many berries will simply fall, staining the road with their bloody juice. One summer evening I passed two Russian Orthodox priests in full regalia reaching to snatch berries from the closest vines, putting them directly into their mouths over their long white beards and pale vestments, heedless of stains.

The rugged nature of the vines means that, short of owning a moon suit, it is impossible to enter either the ravine or the five acres to look for Pearl. Four days after her disappearance, several of us admitted that we could smell a rank odor by the side of the road. Narrowing it to a particular patch of berries, we returned with garden hoes. Gingerly, we pulled back the spiky vines, expecting to find the remains of our cat. Even with long sleeves and gloves we suffered bloody scratches and pricks. The vines, called *rubus ursinus macropetalusare*, are armed with a chemical irritant that keeps the scratches from healing quickly. The local common name for them is Himalayan Blackberry, an invasive species along with Scotch Broom and English Ivy. There are work parties held on a regular basis to fight back the encroaching plants, especially where they climb trees or overrun the natural undergrowth around streams. No such work is ever done on these five acres.

Every summer, we take our colanders and gather berries. Entire families come from tamer neighborhoods, and the more industrious use footstools or stepladders to reach the fruit that hangs at a tantalizing distance, always just beyond arm's length. The plants can reach six feet in height, and I think beyond that, their weight drags them down. The blackberry canes can reach out and grab you, soon entangling a foot or an arm in vicious thorns. Vine cutters or garden clippers are a good tool to bring along. Blackberries can grow up to 15 feet tall, with canes up to 40 feet long.

The more ambitious harvesters pick buckets of berries to freeze and use over the winter months. They will bake cobblers, cookies, breads and preserves. The grasshoppers among us will buy ice cream to accompany the fresh berries, living just for today. Or maybe sprinkle them on our cereal in the mornings. Here is a recipe from a local restaurant:

For my money, there is no better dessert on Earth than the blackberry slump at the Four Swallows restaurant on Bainbridge Island, in Washington State. *Slump* doesn't sound all

that appetizing to you? Fine; refuse to order it, as I did, and watch as it arrives in front of your tablemate smelling like home-baked memories and looking like a cake crossed with a crumble, with blackberries glistening like jewels amid vanilla ice cream and a toasty brown crust. When I finally persuaded my husband to share it, I discovered that the slump tastes even better than it looks. —*Amanda Allington, Honolulu, Hawaii* (Allington)

The five acres are owned by a family descended from early white settlers on the island, just a couple of generations ago. Before that, it was part of the Hall Brothers Shipyard, along with our neighborhood. We sometimes find old bottles gone blue with age among the roots of the second-growth fir trees.

Before, not that long ago, the island was part of the camping and fishing grounds of the Suquamish, Chief Sealth's people. They stuck to the beaches and left the dense, green interior to itself. A lot of ships were built from the first growth forest in the 1800s, making a few people very rich. Not a stick of old growth is left.

Salal, then imported blackberries and ivy took over the spaces opened up to sunlight. With new meadows, and most predators killed or banished, the deer have proliferated. A doe and her two fawns move regularly through our yard, biting off rosebuds and nibbling the tender leaves of the hosta until my husband, infuriated, goes outside and throws rocks at them. They move on, hardly perturbed, to return the next night.

At dusk, the raccoons emerge, drinking from our birdbath and continuing on to the five acres to gorge. These raccoons are huge, easily twice the size of our seven pound cat. Still, they are not known to be aggressive unless cornered. Many times I have watched the cat and the raccoons turn a blind eye towards each other. At first light, they will return to their nests in the ravine.

Three years ago, a family on the island opened an ice cream parlor offering fresh fruit flavors and interesting flavor combinations. “We churn old world flavors—Gianduja, Marron Glace and Dulce de Leche—that are traditional in our hometown, as well as new-school favorites—Goat Cheese with Fig, Banana Split and Lemon Bar,” according to their website. This is a perfect business for Bainbridge, since we have many day visitors from Seattle, here mostly to ride the ferry roundtrip. You can’t go wrong selling sweets to tourists. They named the business Mora. Since the family was from Chile or Argentina or someplace, I figured it was a family name. Recently, my son, whose girlfriend speaks Spanish and used to work at Mora, told me that it means blackberry. I had to stop and think, because I associated the word with a big tree from my childhood. We looked it up. Mora means blackberry or mulberry, but blackberry is listed first.

I knew only one grandparent, my father’s mother, Refugio Ramirez Alcalá Gutierrez. A refugee from the Mexican Revolution, she owned a stone house in East Highlands, California, a short drive from our house in San Bernardino. She had transformed the property into a huge garden over the years, presided over by a spreading mulberry tree with big, dark green leaves. One year, my class at school raised silk worms, and I supplied the voracious eaters with mulberry leaves, bringing useless bags of leaves even after they had spun their brown cocoons and transformed into frail moths.

I spent many hours in that yard, nibbling berries and pomegranates and other fruits that seem impossibly exotic to me now. I would invent kingdoms among the flower stalks and medicinal plants, build bug houses on a scale that made the adults look huge when I returned to them. It was a garden of earthly delights for a solitary child, while the joys and sorrows of an only son and his twice-widowed mother raged inside. It was mostly about money. Late in the

afternoon, I would sit in the kitchen with my grandmother and drink tea with milk in it and eat graham crackers. That is what *mora* meant to me.

The rancid smell in the blackberries turned out to emanate from a rotting log that had probably attracted too much dog pee. We found no sign of Pearl. Later that day, unable to resist the abundance, we went farther down the road, away from the log, to gather berries for ourselves. Two days later, we consumed grilled salmon followed by blackberry pie at our neighbor's house. When Hilary lifted one of their indoor-only cats to her lap later that evening, I had to look away. A feeling of physical craving had come over me, the same I sometimes felt when I saw mothers with their young sons, still small enough to pick up. I missed my cat.

It's been over a week now, and I have stopped checking each door on a regular basis to see if the cat is waiting to be let in. I no longer call "Here kitty kitty, here Pearl," as I walk down the street. All but one poster of her, a compact gray tabby with a white bib and boots, has been taken down. No one called our number, or tried to collect the reward.

What I have avoided saying is this: Pearl was probably eaten by a coyote. She was snatched away in the dark sometime between 10:30 p.m., when I fell asleep, and 6:30 a.m., when she would normally enter the bedroom to see if anyone was willing to come downstairs and feed her.

My son, who came home over the weekend, does not seem too sad. He has been away at college for the better part of three years, accustomed to being absent from the cat, and us. People no longer tell us heroic cat stories of returns after a month, six months, a year. We have washed Pearl's blankets and brushed our chairs and couches. Her dishes have been put away, dismantling the miniature ecosystem in which a spider waited behind a cupboard for tiny insects to visit her

water dish. This might be a form of magical thinking, as Joan Didion would call it, that if we put her things away Pearl will surprise us and return. But mostly, it just made me sad to see them.

The blackberries I eat with ice cream harbor a complicated flavor of sugars, fruit, and something darker, peaty, organic. It is a tangle of story lines, thousands of summers of growth and decay, the soaring song and the abrupt squeak. Somewhere in those brambles may lie Pearl's remains, already nurturing the profligate growth of next season – sweet, and bitter.

Laughing Crow Farm

Betsey Wittick met me at a purple, open-sided shed on the eastern edge of Laughing Crow Farm. Her four acres are part of the Day Road Farmland Trust, an area protected by the City of Bainbridge from urban development. While waiting for Betsey to come out of the main farmhouse, I walked around and noted the garlic and potato beds near the house, the chickens in their coop making those low, rusty gate sounds that people find so comforting.

According to an article on the Sound Food website, Betsey received a Master's degree in Horticulture from Cornell, took a bicycle trip across the country, and stopped when she got to Bainbridge Island. She fell in love with the West Coast and says she was very lucky that in 1984, Junkoh Harui, the late owner of the Bainbridge Island Nursery, gave her a job.

As we talked, Betsey stood and polished bell peppers to an emerald glow for market the next day. She reminds me of the woman in the 'Rosie the Riveter' poster from World War II, not just in her looks, but her innate display of capability. You could leave your car, your toaster or your chicken here, and she would fix it. I faced southwest across sunny fields towards the Bainbridge Winery vineyards, adjacent to Betsey's farm. The gusting wind turned the grape leaves over to show their pale undersides. The terrain here, at the midpoint of the island, is a series of low, open hills, entirely different from where I live. I held my papers down as I wrote.

Sallie Maron joined us a little later, a co-founder of Sound Food. This is one of many interlocking organizations on the island promoting local food, organic food, sustainability, and a dozen other ideas that all sound great and are hard to practice. Sallie is one of those volunteers who is everywhere on the island – pushing, prodding, getting people to organize. I described the concept of a food oasis as I understood it, and asked Betsey if she thought we lived on one.

“We don’t really know what will happen with climate change,” she answered cautiously. “It may be warmer, it may be wetter. I think there will be more variability. Industrial agriculture developed, according to Fred Kirshman, during a few hundred years of climate stability, but now it is fluctuating. Farmers can’t invest in large-scale industry and equipment unless they know that the crop they are cultivating is viable. Before industrial agriculture, there was greater diversity – you didn’t put all your eggs in one basket.

“Now, we need agriculture to be more local. Some think, ‘Technology will save us!’ but infrastructure takes awhile to evolve. We need to be more resourceful in how we raise food.”

Who are your role models? I asked. Your heroes?

Betsey answered without hesitation: “Judy Wicks and David Suzuki.”

She saw Judy speak at the conference of Business Alliances for Local Living Economies (BALLE) in Vancouver, B.C. There were a lot of people there from *Yes!* Magazine, a Bainbridge Island based publication about local sustainability.

Judy is a business entrepreneur from Philadelphia. She once worked as a waitress, “leaving her kid on a piano one night,” she was so tired, and had to go back for him. She lost her job, and began to sell coffee and scones out of the downstairs of the brownstone she rented. It evolved into a restaurant when she began using the barbeque out back and brought furniture from upstairs. “The place was so small, when you finished eating, you passed your plate to the next person to get it back to the kitchen.”

As the restaurant grew, Judy got involved in local equity, and local food. She saw social justice everywhere except in restaurants, so she raised wages. People still came to eat there. Judy began to buy local chicken and beef from the Amish, then pork. She increased distribution of

these products by assisting an Amish farmer in buying a bigger truck. That was twenty five years ago.

Another family started a farm-to-table restaurant in Vermont, the Farmer's Diner, and Judy loaned them money. She ran a restaurant for twenty-five years, but started and funded lots of projects along the way, including dinner conversations, an evening of Dancing with a Tomato, and block parties. "She kept finding fun ways to introduce people to the idea of social justice. Judy cares about local food," Betsey said.

David Suzuki is probably not that well known, Betsey said, since he lives in Canada. He is interested in how we use local resources in the economy. A geneticist by training, Suzuki claims that a woman changed his whole life: Rachel Carson, the author of *Silent Spring*. He's a good speaker who went on to produce *The Nature of Things* for PBS, as well as write lots of books. He has a YouTube video on the economy and the environment.

"He's funny and right on with how I feel about stuff."

A few years ago, according to Betsey, "80-90% of the Nobel Prize winners signed a petition on global warming. No major newspaper carried that story." Instead, O.J. Simpson was the headliner. I looked this up, and the Kyoto Accord may have coincided with the O.J. Simpson trial, but I heard about it. On the other hand, I am the only person in North America who did not see the O.J. Simpson slow motion police pursuit on television.

Suzuki got involved in local economies because he audited an economics class. "He had promised his wife that he would sit quietly, but his hand was raised before he even knew it" to challenge the model. The professor was leaving all sorts of variables out of the equation, because they were not in the model. That's when he knew he had to get involved in how we think about sustainability and economics.

I asked Betsey whether or not we could grow wheat on the island. She said that people were growing wheat in Sequim and Chimacum, both slightly warmer and drier than Bainbridge. Because of the rise of monocultural farming, we have lost the varieties of wheat that would grow here, she said. We can grow wheat, corn, rye, and she has grown triticale, a hybrid of wheat and rye. In fact, Betsey turned out to be the person who grew the grain and baked the bread at the slow food dinner the Fortners hosted for Gary Nabhan. “You need a combine for wheat to thresh and harvest it, unless you want to throw it in the air and winnow it by hand.” This did not seem to interest Betsey.

If we needed to support the population of Bainbridge by the food we grow on it, I asked, what is the first thing we would miss?

“Trees,” she answered. “We would have to cut a lot of the trees down” in order to have the room for crops, as well as the sunlight. “A lot more people would have to be involved in growing food,” she added. “We would have to eat a lot more seasonally, and the diet would change. We would have to shift our way of living.”

“The first thing I would really miss is coffee,” Sallie added. I had to agree with her on that. “But we might be able to grow some things in greenhouses.”

“We would miss olive oil,” added Betsey, “and would need to use animal fats to substitute. We would need hand-presses to extract oil from sunflower seeds. The fat from a cow or pig is better.”

“I’m not 100% a purist,” said Betsey, “but some of the best meals were grown by me or people I know. It is ceremonial food, a meal with a story.”

“Packagers are beginning to take advantage of this” by providing a story for industrial food. I have noticed this packaging in the grocery store – the down-home name, the slightly

crude drawing of farm folk enjoying the sunshine with their happy cows. This is what Betsey and her friends refer to as factory organic.

“The true story is when you know the person who grew the food. If people begin to grow their own food, even if less is bought from the farmers market, it will be worth it” for people to understand what goes into farming.

There is a whole organization on Bainbridge called Islandwood that brings children over from urban Seattle in order to see where food comes from. The children stay for the weekend in a series of cozy buildings out in the woods, where they plant, harvest, prepare and eat meals grown on the land, with the guidance of farmers and chefs. Islandwood was started in 1998 by Paul and Debbi Brainerd, who made their money in Adobe software, when they purchased 255 acres on the south end of the island from Port Blakely Tree Farms. There are even composting toilets with cutaway views of the pipes, so that the kids can see where their own waste goes. Needless to say, this is a big hit. I wonder, however, if the message they leave with, returning to their inner-city homes and schools, is that *on Bainbridge* food can be nurtured and harvested directly, rather than in their own neighborhoods.

A few years ago, a teacher in North Kitsap County got a grant to run a series of “Art in Nature” programs that took fourth graders on field trips. This is the age group originally targeted by Islandwood, although they have since expanded. I went on a couple of the field trips, since my son was that age, and was surprised to see that many children had never been outside except to play sports. They had no idea what to do outdoors if they were not running down a field pursuing a ball. Looking for salamanders or trillium, or sketching landscapes, was an alien activity. So I’m not sure how much transference can take place over a long weekend, when children are only briefly submerged in this environment.

Sallie and another farm advocate, Carolyn Goodwin, started Sound Food in 2007, a nonprofit and website designed to draw attention to local food sources. “Sound Food is made up of people who love local food,” said Betsey, “and support local food: It tastes better. They want to find a way to support local farmers by telling the story, and bringing food to where people are.”

Sound Food started with a map of local food, which did not exist at the time. They wanted to create something that would allow consumers to go straight to the farmers for food. “We wanted to do a green map,” said Sallie. “There wasn’t one for food, to connect farmers with consumers. We wondered, how do we find where things are?”

In one solution, now in its second year, Sound Food came up with an ingenious method to get food directly to busy commuters. During the Farmers Market season, they set up a table at the ferry terminal every Wednesday. Betsey calls this “One of the greatest things.” People get off the ferry, hand five dollars to Sallie or another volunteer, and take home a bag of fresh greens or other vegetables. “It ties in with how we are as a society right now,” said Betsey. “It took a lot of coordination.”

Another person who helped is Marilyn Ostergren. She lives in a straw bale house, and has a Doctorate in Visual Display of Information. “We realized that we could put a map on the website,” said Sallie, “but how would people know it’s there?”

First, they decided, by showcasing farmers. “We used the idea of breaking bread. It is a historic symbol, breaking bread together.” Betsey and her recipes are often featured.

“Second, we wanted to look at the whole food system from distribution, to convenience, to cost.” Ecotrust out of Oregon has created an online program called the Food Hub through

which restaurants can order food from local producers. Sallie and Carolyn received training on how to use the system, which costs \$100 a year to join, per restaurant and per farmer.

From “The Pantry Advisor,” on Sound Food’s website:

At Sound Food we do a lot of thinking about the community's food system. Have you ever stopped to think about an even more local food system - the food system in your own home? Once you begin to examine what you eat and to make choices that include seasonal ingredients and homemade projects, you'll see that you can easily create a system that is interdependent. By-products from homemade meals and scraps from left-over ingredients can be used to create even more deliciously useful things. This series of articles will explore how making the most out of the food system in your own kitchen can save you time and money.

“It's Friday night,” says another posting, “the night before the farmers' market, and you open your vegetable drawer. You're faced with half a zucchini, a sad looking carrot, a few leaves of spinach, and an onion that's seen better days. That's not dinner, you think to yourself and reach for the phone to order a pizza. Stop! Don't do it! Resist the urge to disrespect those veggies left over from your week's meals. You can make something wonderful with those leftovers, if you have a few basic and flexible recipes in your repertoire.”

Betsey has joined the local Grange. Until recently, membership had dwindled to just three, and blackberries threatened to engulf the Grange Hall. Officially known as the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, the national Grange was founded shortly after the Civil War, according to an article in the *Kitsap Sun*. Its halls across rural America hosted dances, potlucks and other events that formed the social fabric of farming communities.

Betsey and Sallie exchanged stories about the old and the new Grange, which revived this year when women farmers began to join. The old-timers, once they recovered from their shock, brought out their sashes and badges, and insisted on enacting the traditional rituals. The women objected to having a Grand Master, saying it sounded like slave times. The Three Graces

are a feature of some of the rituals, including Pomona. “One woman,” said Sallie, laughing, “insisted she did not want to be Pomona because it is an ugly town in California.”

One reason the women joined the Grange is that it has a state and Federal lobbyist, and offers home insurance. The Grange is a fraternal organization formed by the farmers to offer benefits and the power of group bargaining. When first formed locally, the Japanese American farmers on the island were not allowed to join. Nevertheless, “The Grange helped Lilly Kodama’s mother grow raspberries when her husband died” Sallie said. Sallie is also chair of the committee of the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Community that is building a memorial to those sent to camps during World War II. This is located in a newly-formed national park on the island. A membership drive earlier this year has refreshed the Grange membership, and Sallie joined as well. The hall, an eighty-year-old building, is being refurbished and made available for community events:

AT THE GRANGE

The Bainbridge Grange is hosting a gardening fair on Sunday from noon to 3 p.m. Gardening author and Kitsap Sun columnist Ann Lovejoy is headlining the event. She’ll discuss seed-saving and other vegetable-growing strategies. Other speakers include gardening expert Kathy Morse and John Steiner, who will demonstrate how to build a wood-framed garden bed. The Grange and other local organizations will have information tables.

In its efforts to stay alive, the Grange is available for other activities as well. I have attended yoga classes there, and people hold sample sales, private parties, anything to keep the space open and occupied.

Sallie and Betsey invited me to an event at the Grange that was to take place a couple of weeks later. It would bring together farmers, restaurateurs and others involved in food production to introduce use of the Food Hub, the software on which Sallie and Carolyn received training. “Even when people meet face to face, it is good to have an entity like this. We are just

trying to connect things.” By having both farmers and restaurants register on the Food Hub, Sound Food hoped to encourage the farm-to-table connection. Sallie also hopes to bring the farming community back to the Grange. “We are monitoring to see where we can make a difference, trying to make a complete local food environment.” The Food Hub has yet to be introduced or implemented, because people have been too busy.

A local chef, I told Betsey and Sallie, had given me one explanation of why a tomato from the farmers market is so much more expensive than one from the supermarket. They talked approvingly of Stephen Colbert’s testimony before Congress, in which he described his day of work as a farm laborer, shocked by the fact that, in a country that put a man on the moon, dirt is still at ground level. They were grateful for the public discussion.

“Farmers live at poverty level,” said Betsey, “no health insurance, no retirement. The produce brought from California is grown with subsidies, on the backs of Hispanic people.”

Sallie agreed. “The incredible cheapness is because of subsidies. The lack of logic is amazing. People want to pay the least for what they get, and get paid the most for what they do.”

“This year has been tough,” Betsey said. “I got one five-gallon bucket of green peppers. Last year, I got twelve five-gallon buckets.” She grew four or five tons of potatoes, her main crop, and said there is a great book on the history of potatoes, *Potato, a History of the Propitious Esculent*, by John Reader.

Before leaving, I gave Betsey a recipe. An intern at her market stand had wanted to know what I was planning with the vegetables I purchased one day, so I gave her a recipe for tortilla soup. Only later did I realize it would never be used, because most of the ingredients do not grow on Bainbridge Island. But like all good recipes, it could be modified. We would talk some more.

Power

I decided the tree I would miss the most was the coffee tree! We don't have any on Bainbridge, but in its inimitable way, the island has a sister city in Nicaragua, called Omotepe. We import, roast, and sell coffee locally on its behalf, in an operation staffed by volunteers. This is accomplished through a non-profit organization and consists of frequent exchanges of young people and various projects beyond the realm of coffee, including a library for Omotepe. The whole roasted coffee beans are available at Town & Country along with other shade-grown, sustainable, fair-share and otherwise PC coffee. So I thought about interviewing the couple that started that group, Kim and Ela Esterberg.

Then the power went out on the Monday before Thanksgiving. Silly me, I thought. The main thing I would miss if Bainbridge had to grow its own food was power. The island does not generate any power, it merely receives it from the west via transmission lines. Most of the electricity in the Northwest is generated by the Bonneville Power Association on the Columbia River, then sold to power companies such as ours, Puget Sound Power.

Our access to energy fundamentally affects our relationship with food. Ever since that prehistoric mastodon haunch got left too close to the fire, taking on a tasty "seared" flavor, people have been preparing their food with fire and heat. It is a way to preserve food that would otherwise spoil, and renders our food easier to digest. It also neutralizes the toxins in certain foods like tapioca that we would otherwise be unable to eat. I try to imagine the trial and error that went into this process with each fruit, each vegetable, each found object that could hypothetically be converted to food.

By 8:30 on Tuesday night, the temperature in our house had dropped to a chilly 60 degrees, if I stayed within three feet of the fireplace. And we are among the lucky! Our house is built with a fireplace at its center with a huge brick mass that heats up and radiate outward to the rest of the house. We had plenty of wood, and the house is gravity-fed by the city water system. Many houses on the island are on wells that use electric pumps to draw water to the surface. When power began to return to the island one house at a time on Tuesday evening, many of these pumps still did not work because they had frozen in the prolonged 20+ degree weather.

I spent part of that Tuesday wondering how to cook a whole turkey on top of my propane-powered stove. Bainbridge does not have natural gas, and electric stoves have never agreed with me. The oven does not work during power outages, because the thermostat is electric. I could not convince my husband that the Smoky Joe grill was perfectly capable of accommodating our small turkey. Our son was coming home for Thanksgiving.

The molé I make to accompany the turkey, based on a recipe in the Time/Life Latin American cookbook, is in large part possible because I use a blender to break down the nuts, tomatoes, chiles, and numerous other ingredients before cooking it. I realized I would have to grind everything by hand. Where was my granite molcajete? Oh right, outside under a bush. I couldn't remember why. Maybe there's no room in the house for it – a house with a flat-screen TV the size of a baby's crib.

But I was game. We would have to skip the pies I had planned, but everything else was doable. I had some sort of premonition on Monday and purchased all our other food that morning. Neil's potatoes and horseradish, and Betsey's garlic would be part of the mix.

The week before, I ordered a small turkey hen from Town and Country. Choices were listed on a chalkboard that stood outside the door to the meat department. “Heidi’s Hens,” said one line. “Organic. \$3.59 lb.”

“Hmmm,” I said to the very large butcher who was taking orders. “Where do Heidi’s Hens come from?”

“California,” he said. “Even if they say Northwest, they come from California. There is no facility large enough in Washington State to supply us,” he said, meaning all six of the Town & Country stores.

It turns out that Heidi’s Hens are grown by Diestel Family Turkey Ranch “2.5 hours east of San Francisco in Sonora in the picturesque Sierra Nevada Foothills.” And yes, according to their website, there is a real person named Heidi. Farms like this have benefitted from the recent interest in organic poultry.

According to an article in the Los Angeles Times,

Despite economic hardships and shrinking overall turkey production in the U.S., the allure of a fresh, organic turkey has grown in recent years. Farmers and industry experts attribute the increasing demand, particularly in California, to the health-conscious culture, the popularity of the anti-agribusiness sentiment found in the documentary "Food Inc." and the movement for locally grown food. Or maybe it's just simple nostalgia for a classic holiday feast.

Diestel and another farm, Pitman Family Farm, also in Sonora, each sell about 100,000 organic, free-range turkeys a year. “Both sell primarily to high-end grocers such as Trader Joe's, Bristol Farms and Whole Foods,” as well as Town & Country.

The Tuesday before Thanksgiving, in a world of snow and ice, my husband and I walked to the grocery store. He carried a backpack to accommodate it. We had this routine down, since

November has the worst weather of the entire year, often right around Thanksgiving, followed by December. One year, before they had their own children, my two stepdaughters and their husbands were snowed in with us for three days. Seattle and the airport were shut down as well. They kept calling their workplaces to say they could not return, it couldn't be helped. We played Trivial Pursuit in front of the fireplace, and walked into town each day to see what food had made it to T & C. It remains my son's fondest holiday memory.

As in most small towns, the ritual of food is used to celebrate community events on a large scale. Bainbridge celebrates the Fourth of July and Mochizuki, a Japanese New Year celebration, with huge community meals. Town & Country probably does its greatest volume of business during the days before Thanksgiving, when many islanders return home to be with their families.

The store was dark, using only the natural light filtering in through the high skylights. We made our way to the back of the store and picked up our pre-ordered Heidi's Hen. T & C, which has generators for the deep freeze and some dairy only, was crowded with panicked shoppers. The last I saw of Rick Nakata, he stood next to a shopping cart full of cartons of ice cream, giving them away free. My husband could not resist, especially if there would be no pie.

We placed our ice cream on the front porch with the turkey. I kept checking to make sure the turkey was there. If the coyotes could carry off our cat, what would stop them from taking the turkey? Except that the turkey, at nine pounds, was bigger.

Before going to bed that night, we moved the turkey to the garage, and the ice cream to the dark refrigerator. That's when the power returned. The house began to warm, and was back in the 'normal' range by the time we got up the next day.

On Wednesday, I made two pumpkin meringue pies. I had never made a meringue before, and made my husband separate the eggs for me. The pies turned out well enough to post their photos on Facebook. We had a small celebration at home, while Hilary and Neil hosted Linda and Stephen and their many children and friends next door. We once attended a large Thanksgiving gathering at Linda and Stephen's, but this year the pipes at Chateau Poulet had frozen.

We were happy to spend some quiet time with Ben, who is a student in California. Stephen wanted to meet our brainy, musical son, having heard so many stories from Hilary and Neil, so once I was sure they were through the main part of the meal, I took Ben over for a few minutes along with one of the meringue pies. I knew we would never eat both of them, and Hilary had already told me that the raccoons had eaten the pumpkin pie a guest had stored on the back porch.

We ate our dinner earlier that day, confining ourselves to breakfast and an early dinner, our practice with holiday meals. The return of power meant we could use the oven for the turkey, and I happily tossed ingredients into the blender to make molé. One of the mysteries of food is how so many different flavors can combine to make one new flavor, in this case, a smoky, nutty, spicy sauce that complements red meat and white, and freezes well. I make it a little differently each year, so that the flavor varies along with it. I'm not sure that Nathan Myhrvold, who recently released his *Modernist Cuisine: The Art and Science of Cooking*, tested in his space-age kitchen, would approve of my random cooking practices, but I don't care. Looking at the website of his company, Intellectual Ventures, I think he has bigger fish to fry.

A real cook, I think, uses what is available at the time, to enhance freshness, use of leftovers, and to create a spontaneous meal that surprises just a little each time. In a world where

millions of homemakers still cook over stoves that release smoke directly into their living spaces, causing respiratory disease and consuming precious firewood and charcoal, I find Myhrvold's efforts interesting, but esoteric.

After a few days of huddling in our down parkas and feeding wood into our stoves and fireplaces, the people on Bainbridge were happy to get back to artificial heat. In our case, it is generated by a heat pump that works at maximum efficiency when the temperature indoors and out vary by more than fifteen degrees. We have no romantic ideas about heating with wood. Our home in Colorado was heated only by a woodstove, and for weeks, months after we moved to Seattle, our clothing and belongings reeked of smoke. My father grew up in California in a house with no power, using a kerosene lamp to study. The yellow light is hard to read by, and he claimed it ruined his eyes.

I froze the two turkey legs, which would each make a meal of turkey soup at our leisure, and part of the molé. I take a lot for granted when it comes to food preparation – that someone else will grow and harvest the vegetables, slaughter and process the meat, make the cheese, gather the eggs. I'm really only responsible for putting it together in meals, but even that seems difficult without power.

I Think That I Shall Never See...

Betsey Wittick's remarks about trees reminded me that I wanted to talk to Olaf Ribeiro, a famous tree pathologist who lives on the island. We agreed to meet at the Bainbridge Historical Society, which is walking distance from my house and has three heritage trees in front. The museum wasn't open at 10:00 a.m., but we convinced the staff to let us come in and use their meeting room.

Even in an Indiana Jones hat and a heavy leather coat, Dr. Ribeiro resembles Gandhi with his compact stature and round, wire-framed glasses, and it is easy to imagine him chaining himself to a tree to protest its removal. He has threatened to do on a number of occasions, but as far as I know, his adversaries have always blinked first.

If we had to feed ourselves from food grown on the island, Betsey said, the first thing we would miss would be the trees. We would have to cut many of them down in order to clear the land and take advantage of what little sunlight we have.

There are a lot of trees on Bainbridge. At one time, the Blakely Shipyard was the largest in the world, turning trees into ships as fast as they could be felled. Every single tree on the island was cut down, and those that we see today are second or third growth, although a few look older. The trees on my property are second growth Douglas firs, and are over 100' tall. That is over twice as tall as most houses.

Trees are also a big deal because they fall down. These second growth trees grew up quickly without the natural diversity of a forest, so they have shallow roots. They depend on each other to break and filter the wind, to provide shade and sustenance for new trees, and a few plants. Much of the undergrowth on the island has been taken over by invasive species, such as ivy and blackberries, but the trees are mostly native to the northwest.

When people remove some of the trees in a grove, or a big wind comes, or especially, both, the trees fall down and take the power lines with them, or smash cars and houses. This leads people to regard trees as nuisances, and often move to cut down the trees on their property without waiting for an accident.

But all of the fresh water on Bainbridge Island comes from underground aquifers. No one ever talks about it, but aquifers must be re-charged by surface water. Every time we cut down trees, build new houses or streets, more water runs off the surface and returns to the ocean without stopping to visit the aquifer. This may seem an odd concern in the Pacific Northwest, with all our rain, but on an island, it makes a difference. San Juan Island in the San Juans, north of us, regularly runs low on domestic water, and the residents have to buy bottled water and bring it in.

I asked Ribeiro about this. Each mature tree, he said, absorbs three to five hundred gallons of water a day. When you take out these trees, there is no place for the water to go, and it causes flooding. “A good example is Halls Hill,” an area at the south end that recently experienced flooding after some new development.

“The rule of thumb for replacing these trees is that it takes twelve large trees to replace one huge tree, and then it takes twenty years for those trees to grow.”

Instead of just complaining about it, there are people working to replace trees that are lost to development. A man named Jim Trainer planted his millionth tree this year in Kitsap County. In Kirkland, they are aiming for 3,000 new trees this year. Volunteers are also replanting the Juanita woodlands after people got upset five years ago about trees falling. They have a volunteer group of about fifty people who plan to plant 10,000 trees.

Ribeiro has had less success here on Bainbridge. “Everyone I talk to loves trees, but between trees and developers, the developers win.”

In Seattle, Ribeiro has found that developers will change their plans to accommodate trees. The big difference is that there is no city ordinance on Bainbridge Island to preserve trees. “They say they are tree-huggers,” he says, but they are not. Hunts Point, Mercer Island, and many other upscale communities have tree ordinances, which require permission from the city to remove a tree. Part of this is the culture. Hunts Point and Mercer Island are in King County, the same as Seattle, and largely urban in nature. The property owners are wealthier, and do not make their living from the land.

Kitsap County, which includes Bainbridge, is mostly rural in nature. Until recently, many of the residents made their living from industries related to the harvest of trees – lumber mills, construction, land development. It also has a high military presence, with the accompanying high regard for individual property rights. Like many people in Washington, Oregon and Northern California, the residents of Kitsap County have had to find new occupations as the lumber industry has slowed. Often, that occupation is related to tourism. The success of the Twilight books and movies has been a boon to Forks, Washington, a nearly defunct lumber town not too far west of here.

A friend told me that when new people bought the lot next to theirs, they cut down all the trees and built their home as close to the property line as they could. After that, they began asking my friend and her husband to cut down *their* trees. Who you gonna call? Olaf Ribeiro, the ghostbuster of tree preservation. He came out and supported their preference to keep the trees.

Often it is just a question of a waterfront view. Ribeiro advocates a “filtered view,” and notes that trees provide a place for wildlife to perch. There was an incident in Seattle where a

judge had trees in an adjacent park cut to improve his view. He was fined a substantial amount. “On Bainbridge, if it was a powerful person, the city would back down,” he said. Ribeiro convinced some property owners to retain the trees on their property, and the owners later thanked him profusely. They find themselves, he said, watching the eagles and other birds that perch in the trees as much as viewing the water beyond.

There is a big development of condominiums and retail space near my house. People worked to save several large trees as various plans and configurations were presented. At the same time, Winslow Way, the main street of Winslow, was widened. Many large trees were lost. This was about ten years ago. At the time, I posed my husband and son by them before the trees were cut down. In the photos, the trees dwarf the little figures below them. I had to stand across the street and about a block away to get the spreading, big-leaf maples and hemlocks in the frame. When I looked at the photos recently, I realized that I had already forgotten what the street looked like with those towering canopies and textured trunks at street level. Others have moved here since, and have no idea there used to be big trees just north of the ferry terminal. I had duplicate copies, so I gave a set to Ribeiro.

He looked at the photos with sadness. The development saved a couple of big trees behind the buildings where most of us cannot see them, but Ribeiro is not satisfied. “They did a terrible job,” he said, “and have done nothing to keep those trees alive.”

I didn't tell him about the terrible tree slaughter that took place six years ago in our neighborhood. A young family lived next door, and when a nearby house and its adjacent, undeveloped lot came on the market, the wife's parents bought them. Everyone seemed happy. The newer neighbor said he was going to clear a few trees and develop the second lot. One weekend, while his daughter and her family were out of town, a logging crew came in and cut

almost all the trees on all three lots. These were huge trees, and every time trees are cut in this neighborhood, it weakens all the other trees, since they depend on each other as windbreaks. The noise and was overwhelming. You think trees can't scream? Listen to the chainsaws. I had to leave my house, as did the neighbor who lived between the two properties. She and her husband, feeling exposed without the surrounding groves, moved shortly after.

When the young family came home, they were shocked. The woman's father said he was surprising them by creating a soccer field for the two children. The younger family soon moved away to another part of the island, leaving us with her parents, who have continued to denude their lot and engage in illegal construction. They are involved in litigation with their next door neighbors, and may still be involved in some from their last residence in a nearby town.

Ribeiro and I went outside and talked about the trees in front of the Historical Society, a sycamore, an American elm, and a red oak. We both remember when the same spot held a pet store with parking under those trees. The city purchased the lot in order to create a work yard for its utility trucks. Ribeiro testified to the city council about the value of the trees, planted in 1880, including the story that the cuttings had been transported around Cape Horn and originated at Kew Gardens. In the nick of time, just like in a movie, a woman came forward with the original notes her father had kept as he nurtured the little trees in his cabin during the rough voyage.

"These trees were brought across the ocean from Britain," Ribeiro said. "They're the last of their size remaining in downtown."

The city was convinced to save the trees, and even came up with the money to dig up the broken asphalt and compacted gravel surrounding the roots. The soil was so rocky that they had to keep sharpening the blades on the excavating equipment. Ribeiro put down a mulch that a

company in Olympia donated, containing a “mix of biologicals” – beneficial organisms – to help keep the trees alive. How do they look now? I asked.

“They look good, but need another shot.”

Ribeiro now has a financial resource for his tree activism, the ‘Save Bainbridge Island Trees Fund.’ “People send me money,” he said, “but I save it as a contingency in case I need to sue the city.” In the past, a local attorney gave his time *pro bono*. It costs \$550 even to file against the city. Right now, the City of Bainbridge is nearly bankrupt, so there is not likely to be much city-funded development in the near future. “Time is a friend,” he said.

There is a beautiful grove of trees in North Seattle that Ribeiro has fought to save. I remember it from when I lived in the area fifteen years ago. Ingraham High School wants to get rid of the trees and put up buildings instead. “But the whole community loves the trees,” he said. “If you take out eighty trees, there will be a lot of runoff, a lot of erosion. I gave my time *pro bono*. The school authorities keep saying it’s an old grove, ready to die. That is the wrong thing to say to Ribeiro, who believes that trees never need to die.

“The biggest stumbling block is money. I’m always amazed that people are passionate enough to give money.” Often, Ribeiro isn’t even given enough time to move the trees.

At Bainbridge High School, the authorities wanted to cut down a grove of cherry trees. They finally allowed Ribeiro to move them, but would not wait until November when they were dormant. He had to move them in full bloom. “It worked because of the biologicals,” he said. The trees lived.

At the other end of Winslow Way is one of two Virginia Prune trees on the west coast, probably mistaken for a fruitless plum when it was planted, a common landscaping tree. “No one knows where it came from,” said Ribeiro, but he was able to save it from street-widening. “The

city doesn't realize that tree tours are getting bigger. People will pay to look at trees." He sees it as a form of tourism good for the local economy. People often come over to the island on foot from downtown Seattle, and are looking for things to do in Winslow. Ribeiro occasionally leads tree tours himself, and has prepared *A Walking Guide to the Historic and Champion Trees of Bainbridge Island* describing notable trees in the downtown area.

I asked about the fruit trees that have been brought to the island over the years. I walked past a huge fruit tree in a yard on Cave Avenue for three years before realizing it was a fig. I never thought they grew this far north. The tree, it turns out, was planted by a member of the Loveritch family that helped start Town & Country Market. At that time, the house it stands next to, built in 1906, faced east across a field of lentils as far as Ferncliff Avenue, and as far north as High School Road. There are several fig trees scattered across the island, all related to this tree, all descended from a tree somewhere in Croatia.

Ribeiro has not paid that much attention to the fruit trees on Bainbridge, surprisingly. He has been too busy trying to save the older trees, but he told me what he knew. "There are apple, fig, cherry, and apricot trees," he said. "The second largest apricot in Kitsap County is on Ferncliff, second house on the right past High School Road." Almost all of these are remnants of orchards planted by the early white settlers in the late 1800s. At the foot of Cave Avenue, in the parking lot of a bank, stands a lone apple tree. Its fruit falls and rolls into the busy thoroughfare of Winslow Way. When the Fortners make apple cider, we gather up the windfall and take it to them. A mix of apples, supposedly, makes the best cider.

"All of downtown was an orchard," Ribeiro said, imagining the past. "Twenty acres. All that you can see here was apple trees. Why this one has survived is beyond me."

“The biggest maple on the island was cut down,” said Ribeiro. No one saw a reason to save it. “Today I would have better luck,” he said, “because of e-mail” that allows him to rally his supporters quickly. “The climate has changed enough so that people get incensed to act.”

Ribeiro threatened to chain himself to an English walnut at a one-time bed-and-breakfast called The Captain’s House, and managed to save it. “Oh my god, I hope he lives forever,” said Meg Hagemann, standing near the 100-year-old walnut tree outside her Parfitt Way home. “He is an island treasure.”

When a developer announced he had permission to rip the walnut out to make way for a utility pipeline, Hagemann didn't know what to do. But Ribeiro came to the rescue with documents showing the tree was planted by Winslow pioneer Ambrose Grow, and negotiated a compromise that routed the pipes beneath the tree's roots.

“I've had visitors come, holding hands, and ask me to take their picture under it,” Hagemann said. “It's what we all long for. It's an oasis of peace.”

I asked if there were any native nut trees. “Filberts are native to this area,” he said. I had heard of filberts, but did not know what they were until we went out and looked at some. Filberts, it turns out, are native hazelnut trees, and squirrels were busily burying them around the lanky trees that flank the Bainbridge Performing Arts building. These, too, were saved when the city built the plaza next to City Hall, where the farmers market convenes. A volunteer, Sandy Shoupe, does most of the maintenance on them. Before, “you couldn’t see the trees for the ivy.”

“They help clean the atmosphere. If they take out the eighty trees at Ingraham, the loss of carbon sequestered by those trees will be much less. That’s why we are planting more and more trees.” People forget about the mitigating effect of trees on carbon emissions in the fight with City Hall, he said, “and it’s not a trade-off I want.”

“We’re short-changing our kids,” he said. Ribeiro has two grown children, an “ambitious son” in Santa Monica who likes to play sports year-round, and a daughter who is a nurse in Bellingham.

Ribeiro is the son of immigrants from Goa, an island that is part of India, to Kenya. He was sent to school in Britain, then returned to manage a four thousand acre farm for the government. When the crops developed some diseases, he was sent to the University of West Virginia under a USAID program to study wheat pathologies. In the meantime, the government changed in Kenya, and no longer required his services, so he stayed at West Virginia and completed a Ph.D. in Plant Pathology. He taught for a number of years at the University of California, Riverside, before moving to Bainbridge Island in 1981. He is a specialist in a fungus called *phthorora* “that attacks everything,” and has published two books used in over eighty countries.

I asked about the relationship between trees and fungus. Ribeiro’s e-mail name is ‘fungispore’. The relationship is both good and bad, he said. Fungi are good, part of the tree, and it is a symbiotic relationship. “Without mushrooms, trees would not survive.”

In Britain, he said, fungi reduce the height of certain trees through stress, limiting height and causing them to put out more branches from the trunk. He visits Britain on a regular basis to give talks on how to bring back ancient trees. Ribeiro insists that trees have no finite life, that with proper care, they can live forever. Trees brought back from near death are called “Phoenix trees,” and Ribeiro has received national media attention in the *Wall Street Journal* and on NBC’s *Today Show* for his work with the Doomsday Oak and the Tortworth Chestnut, in Gloucestershire, United Kingdom. Written records of the chestnut go back to the 12th century, and it was said to have been a boundary tree to the Tortworth estate at about this time. It was

probably planted by Roman troops, since it is native to the Mediterranean. Although only part of the original remains, many of the branches of its huge twisted trunk have rooted to become trees themselves, giving the appearance of a small wood.

The chestnut is twenty-three feet in diameter, located on church grounds. "People are in awe of these trees," he said. "There is dead silence when they see them, the trees have so much power."

"There are people who are really passionate about trees," said Ribeiro, referring to the tree sitter, Julia Butterfly Hill, who sat in a 1,000 year old California redwood for two years to save it from harvest.

"People saved the trees on Kahlgren Road," at the north end of the island. A bulldozer operator came out to take down the trees in order to widen the road. "Why not widen it on the other side?" asked Ribeiro. "A woman came out and put her chair in front of the bulldozer and read her newspaper." Someone came out from the planning department to see what was going on, and was very difficult. A second person came out who was familiar with Ribeiro's work, and the trees were saved.

"On Bainbridge, all that is required is that the drainage around the proposed houses in a development is clear. The developers are not accountable for the surrounding area. But when the trees are removed, there is flooding. There is no regulation on where water goes from the development."

"I've lost faith in a tree ordinance," he said. "They've been at it for years."

Ribeiro has looked at NASA satellite photos that show the increasingly diminished tree canopy on Bainbridge. In some places, people can be fined triple damages for property damages, and can sue for emotional damage if trees are taken down illegally.

Ribeiro attended an annual Arbor Day Foundation meeting earlier this year in Lincoln, Nebraska. The theme is “Developing with Trees.” A developer told how the people in Sacramento asked him to hire an arborist rather than take down some trees for a new development. He planned the houses around the trees, and earned himself so much good press and good will, it changed his approach. He is now willing to cantilever new buildings or houses to save trees. “No one had ever told him how to build with trees,” Ribeiro said.

The city wanted to take out the black locust at the Congregational Church at the corner of Winslow Way and Madison Avenue. Ribeiro and Ann Lovejoy, a local gardener and author, got together to save it.

“I was going to chain myself to that tree, too,” said Ribeiro. “It is absolutely incredible that they wanted to take that down.” A woman from Whidbey Island, north of here, called and offered to bring him food once a day if he did so, either lunch or dinner. Another person offered to build him a livable tree house for the duration.

I asked if it was possible to strike a balance between people and trees.

“Balance?” he asked. “Yes, we can’t do without trees. It is part of our psychological and sociological make-up. We’ve got to have them in every neighborhood. Not just parks.”

A study from the University of California at Davis shows that the presence of trees in the inner city reduces crime. Another study by Professors Frances Kuo and Bill Sullivan at the University of Illinois shows that trees are embedded in our psyche, and we need to start designing cities with this in mind. “That’s why people want parks.”

Researchers, according to the study, “found fewer reports of physical violence in homes that had trees outside the buildings. During interviews, those residents reported using more constructive, less violent ways of dealing with conflicts involving their children and partners

than residents living in buildings without trees. Of 150 residents interviewed, 14% of residents living in barren conditions have threatened to use a knife or gun against their children versus 3% for the residents living in green conditions.

One surprising finding from the photo simulation study was that residents identified settings with trees as places where they would feel safe. In fact, Sullivan noted, the more densely planted pictures received the highest safety ratings. In addition, people living near trees reported feeling safer than those living in more stark surroundings. Building managers and police had predicted trees would increase feelings of fear.

“At one point, the city wanted to take down the trees at Waterfront Park to make a skate park,” said Ribeiro, but he cited Kuo and Sullivan’s work that “children played in outdoor spaces with trees about twice as often as in barren spaces around their homes.”

I asked if there was an optimum ratio of trees to people. “Well, more trees, as far as I am concerned.” A study in Britain showed that one tree can support 170 different life forms. Ribeiro himself found 40 on one tree, including micro organisms.

I described the various mushrooms growing under my trees this year, an unusually large and varied number. “Douglas firs can host many types of fungi,” he said. “If not, they need nutrients, including fungi.”

We had a close call with our trees about three winters ago. I didn’t tell Ribeiro about this, either. During winter storms, the trees bend and thrash, and drop branches on the roofs of our houses. In the morning, we go out and pick up the branches, sweep the needles, and get on with it. After a particularly noisy storm, we went out one morning to find one of our trees fallen across the front yard and driveway, between the mailbox and the house. If it had fallen a little farther south, it might have flattened us in our bed upstairs. We stood outside the garage while my husband wondered how we were going to move it.

“Just wait a few minutes,” I said. “Everyone will be out here.” Sure enough, the neighborhood men grabbed their chainsaws and descended on the house. A neighbor with a pickup hooked a chain to the back and pulled the section across our driveway sideways. One neighbor, who I had never before seen do yard work, volunteered to clear the rest if he could have the wood, and he did. But during storms, I have to admit I lie awake at times wondering if this is it.

I told Ribeiro about Betsey Wittick’s remarks. “One of the staples we need are fruits,” he said. “We need apples, cherries, and apricots to compliment vegetable gardens. It’s true, you can grow more vegetables in a small space. But if we grow just vegetables, we would spend a lot just importing fruits.”

At some point, “a physician on Euclid was growing every variety of apple to see which would grow best,” Ribeiro said. “He kept books and books of records,” but Ribeiro failed to get them, or copies of them, when the doctor retired and moved away.

Ribeiro thought about it some more. “We could have a complete balanced diet if we grew fruit trees. In fact, I’m surprised Akio (Suyematsu) never planted fruit trees. If not fruit trees, at least some trees.” I checked later, and Akio does grow a few Christmas trees.

Ribeiro gave me a copy of an article he had been preparing to send to the local paper. It is full of the peppery indignation I found in person. He quotes an Indian proverb in it:

Only when the last tree has been cut down; only when the last river has been poisoned; only when the last fish has been caught; only then will you find that money cannot be eaten.

Plowing by Moonlight

Friday was the second moon of September, a harvest moon, and many of the farmers on the island stayed up all night celebrating with a bonfire and food at the Day Road farms.

Photographer Joel Sackett wanted to capture moonlit black and white photos. An island resident since 1995, he has two books showcasing the island and its residents, *In Praise of Island Stewards*, and *An Island in Time*.

For thousands of years, farmers have raised fires up against the black night, and to close-knit communities they were pivotal events. Held on the evening of a solstice or equinox, bonfires were bridges between seasons, a time for giving thanks and asking for blessing in one gesture of transition.

Ian Bentryn from *In Praise of Island Stewards*.

We hoped Joel could take some photos to use with this collection of essays. How wonderful it would be, we said, to have Betsey Wittick and her plowhorse Samantha photographed in silhouette against the moon, the epitome of the romanticized idea of a farmer's life.

Not to jump ahead, since I hadn't finished the collection, and getting a publisher these days is a minor miracle. But I could already see the image on the cover, had already seen a book in the format I wanted from the University of Washington Press, a collection of essays and photos by another writer and photographer I knew. The title that occurred to me, "Plowing by Moonlight" brought together many of the disparate parts of the book, made it seem like a coherent whole. There is a point in a project when it announces itself to me, seems to crystallize around a central idea, even though, before then, I thought I knew what I was doing all along. I waited to see what images the night would reveal to Joel.

Saturday was the usual Farmers Market downtown, albeit with sleepy farmers. There was a particular urgency on this, one of the waning days of the season. People bought scads of ripe tomatoes for canning, bags of lettuce, buckets of potatoes. Whatever price the farmers named, we pulled it out of our pockets and purses without question; no one bargains at the Bainbridge Farmers Market, although one day when I came up short of cash, the farmer gave me my carrots anyway.

The next day, a Sunday, was the Harvest Fair at Johnson Farm. This is another traditional farm preserved by the city and several nonprofit groups from further development, back when the city was flush with cash and felt magnanimous about exempting properties from higher taxation. I'm not sure that would happen today, with the city broke and almost all acquisition of land fuelled by developers with cash resources to pursue the permitting process.

It was drizzly and overcast, as usual, but this did not dampen the spirits of the young families at the fair. Live music and a comedian entertained the crowds, seated on hay bales while listening. The smell of Thai food and sweet, frying donuts carried from an assortment of booths, while others conducted raffles and farm life demonstrations. Tom the Turkey was there in a cage so that prospective ticket buyers could inspect him before a raffle, the details posted on the cage. He would be plucked, processed, and delivered to the winner; good thing he couldn't read. A giant slide zigzagged down a hill, rigged by combining irrigation tubing and hay bales, much to the screaming delight of children.

There were sheep to pet and apples to press from heritage trees right on the property. In one paddock, a woman was shearing sheep in front of a crowd of parents and children. The sheep put up with being held awkwardly on their backs and did not seem offended by the process. I felt a little self-conscious with my camera and minus a child, mine having aged out of the little

companion role long ago. I now realized how much I depended on Ben – a cute, outgoing kid with a talent for the piano – to insinuate myself into situations where I did not know anyone. It was obvious, I felt, that I was there to observe people, rather than to entertain my son and enjoy his company. Even when he was older, so many people knew Ben or knew about him through their kids that they would come up and talk to us, something it is difficult for me to do by myself.

A different crowd than I usually see attended that day. These are the children the farmers hope to educate, to win over by showing them how to start tomatoes and where potatoes come from. Their parents were about evenly split between the ‘we are growing most of this ourselves anyway’ crowd and more affluent commuters who need something to do with their children on the weekend. There was an elaborate recycling system in place for our cups and plates that promised “zero waste.”

One of our fall activities with Ben when he was little was to visit Hunter Farm on the Hood Canal, west of here, to buy pumpkins and run through a corn maze. They figured out the tourist angle to the farming business a long time ago. It’s our substitute for the color tour we used to take through the Rocky Mountains, to see the leaves turn, when we lived there. We still visit Hunter Farm without him, taking the day to drive around the south end of the canal and back across the bridge, but it’s not as much fun.

I hoped to see Joel here and find out how the shoot had gone on Friday night. I knew it was before noon, but I figured he might have recovered after a full twenty four hours. Betsey Wittick, who I also expected to see, maybe with Samantha, was absent, too. Another family was giving wagon rides hitched to a pair of docile ponies.

I ate a piece of blackberry pie and drank revivifying coffee from The Treehouse Bakery, which had set up a rolling coffee stand at the fair. I visited with a friend who is starting a

woodworking co-op modeled on one in Green Valley, Arizona, where he and his wife have a second home. He staffed a booth at the Harvest Fair where interested parties could sign up. The co-op will be a work space with tools where people can take classes or bring projects for crafting. I visited a teepee where a family in cowboy gear seemed to be advertising their beef. That was confusing. I waited.

Finally, around one o'clock, just as I was about to leave, Joel showed up. He was desperate for a cup of coffee, and looked as though he had been up all night working. But he always looks like that. It turned out that Betsey decided conditions were not right for Samantha on Friday, and the younger horses were not yet ready to plow in the dark with lots of strangers, fires, and general carryings on around them. But Joel had some good shots, he said, of Betsey and Samantha together. I probably could not hide my disappointment, because a happy woman and a horse is just not the same image as a woman walking behind a horse in harness, especially for a book about food. Besides, there was something mystical in that image of moonlight, I felt, a deeper metaphor that would appeal to a wide audience. I could not quite place my finger on it.

Samantha, a handsome chestnut-colored Belgian – bigger than a riding horse, with furry, high-stepping hooves – was probably the most photographed horse on the island. She appears in one of Joel's books, her huge head with a white blaze hanging over Betsey's shoulder from behind. Originally purchased by the Bainbridge Winery, Samantha was expected to cultivate between the rows with a minimum impact on the soil. It turned out she had a taste for grape leaves, however, and ran away with the plow a couple of times before they decided not to use her in that capacity.

"The kids could drive her," Betsey said, because she was steady and sensible enough, except around grapevines. The horse became an integral part of the farm education program. She

didn't seem to mind being around children, although she was not especially social on a one to one basis. She often turned her nose up at a proffered carrot or apple if it was not up to her standards. In short, Samantha and Betsey had become icons of island farming.

What neither of us knew at the time was that Betsey had been up all of Saturday night with Samantha. On Saturday morning, Betsey had not noticed anything unusual before leaving for the market. When she returned, Samantha was lying down. She was foaming at the mouth and appeared to be having an allergic reaction, possibly to something she ate in the fields on Friday night. Her gums were white. Betsey called the vet, who was home with the flu, and gave her Milk of Magnesia and shots of a muscle relaxant, according to directions from the vet.

The horse did not get better, and continued ill into the evening. That night, Betsey had to call the vet and ask how to tell if she was dead. The vet told her to touch the sclera on her eye and see if she reacted. She did not. It was 8:45 p.m.

Samantha, was buried "like an Egyptian queen," Betsey told me later. They worked all night by moonlight and flashlight. The horse was so heavy, at 800 pounds, that they didn't know how to move her. The vet, still by telephone, told her to truss Samantha like a turkey before rigor mortis set in. this would make her the most compact shape possible for burial. Betsey, her interns, and some other farmers then put a chain around the horse's neck and dragged her with a tractor to the edge of the field. "We buried her near a white oak tree I had planted a few years back," according to Betsey's blog, "my favorite tree species because of the grace and strength they develop with age."

I surrounded her with carrots, cabbage, corn (some of her favorite foods), a small grape vine wreath to represent how she came to me thru the Bentryn's vineyard & winery... and my favorite rock as the part of me that continues with her.

Samantha was twenty six. I thought that seemed old for a horse, but at the time, Betsey said that wasn't old at all. She talked calmly about the death, her voice steady. Maybe it was the practical farmer in her, or maybe it was shock.

In her blog, Betsey admits that Samantha was nearing the end of her expected lifespan, and suffered from a choke a week or two earlier. A set of two younger horses had already been acquired, anticipating a time when Samantha would be gone.

"I feel fortunate to have been with her during her passage with the moon once again shining," Betsey said. "I will miss her."

I was unhappy about this development, not just for the sake of Betsey and Samantha, but for my own sake. There went my metaphor, and my title. Now what would I do? Joel assured me that there were other good photos from that night, but I wanted that photo, taken on that night, as part of the frantic cycle I was living out trying to finish this book within a year. I can get a little obsessive at times. It took me awhile to back off and consider it more carefully. I then realized I could use the title, the idea, after all.

In death, Samantha completed the metaphor I had not quite understood. Rather than the gauzy idyll of Betsey and her horse in the moonlight, through which I had hoped to seduce innocent readers into my own vision of this landscape, Betsey was left with the hard grief of dragging a companion across the cold ground to her grave. An aloof, hard-working animal, Samantha lived out the full cycle of her life in tune with the agricultural calendar, mirroring the independent and eccentric lives around her, a mascot for local farming. This was the real romance, I realized, that the rest of us could go to the market or the grocery store and buy food, for little effort on our own parts. The farmers work every day, day in and day out, and sometimes into the night to produce food while most of the population of Bainbridge Island sleeps.

Eating as a Jewish Act

During my interviews with farmer Betsey Wittick, I was struck by her use of the word ‘ceremony’ a couple of times in discussing the consumption of food. To Betsey, food was meaningful if it had a story, if she could trace it from the ground to the table, and was grown and served by people she knew.

Rabbi Mark Glickman is not obsessed with the minutiae of the rules and regulations in the Torah, or as interpreted through the ages in Rabbinic literature. As a Reform rabbi, he is flexible in his approach – he drives from east of Seattle on Shabbat to serve the congregation of Kol Shalom on Bainbridge Island, where the cantor is a woman.

“As Meir Tamari, an Israeli economist, has noted,” Jeffrey K. Salkin says in *Being God’s Partner*, “more than 100 commandments in the Torah address economics, but only 24 form the basis of traditional Jewish dietary practice.”

Yet, Mark’s take on food was the opposite of Betsey’s. “When we say the prayer, ‘Blessed are you Adonai, who brings forth food’ – we are telling a story about the food. We could praise the baker, or the trucker, or anyone else who helped produce it, but we thank God. The food comes from God, through the ground and onto our plate. We raise eating above the gluttony that has become part of our modern lives by telling a story. The prayer opens our eyes to the connection God has established with us.”

“The modern eating process,” he says, “harkens back to the laws of sacrifice. The home is still treated as a sanctuary, *mikdash m’at*, and the table is the altar, or *mikdash m’at*, little sanctuary. *Mikdash* is from the root of *kadosh*, which means devoted. The practice of Judaism is meant to evoke an earlier time, an idealized time, when the Temple was still standing.”

I noted that in his book, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Michael Pollan said that the directions for Jewish sacrifice made a point of rotating the priests who performed the ritual, so that they would not become inured to the killing.

“Yes,” Glickman said. “If you read the laws, there seems to be an awareness of the taking away of a life. We are allowed to do it, but it was a big deal.

“When I was studying in Israel, some Bedouins took us on a camel safari into the Sinai during Pesach (Passover). We asked to eat a goat, and we stopped at an encampment. We were encouraged to pet the goat, to play with it, talk to it. The Bedouins held its head and said some prayers. They sent up smoke, and used a clean knife to slaughter it.

“I imagine that is very much what it was like when there were sacrifices in the Temple. There is a similar sense in the Torah.

“Adam and Eve were not allowed to eat meat. Only with Noah did we receive permission to eat meat, as a way to release our aggression. It's not ideal, but it's better than taking it out on each other.”

“Really?” I asked. “I've never heard that.”

“I made that last part up,” he confessed.

Anthropologist Spencer Wells has a different take on that. In *Pandora's Seed*, he cites research showing that hunter/gatherer societies are less aggressive than agrarian societies. Since the sample of hunter/gatherers left on the planet is fairly small, the conclusions seem a bit tenuous. Yet I can see that, once someone has planted some land, watered and weeded it, and spent all spring shooing off the crows, he is going to get aggressive if someone tries to take the land or the food. Wells claims that there were always enough resources for hunter/gatherer

groups, since they require very little in the way of material goods, and that dependence on cultivating food leads to shortages.

While I'm not an anthropologist, I'm going to hazard that hunter/gatherers quickly shed any members of the group who were not productive or could not keep up, while fixed-in-place, agrarian societies were able to keep the elderly and ailing alive even if they were not contributing directly to food production or acquisition. So I suppose on a strictly survival level, that is the trade-off: there are sufficient resources for the hunter/gatherers, but there are fewer and more productive people living under those conditions.

The directions in Torah for planting, gathering, leaving the fields fallow every seventh year, leaving a portion of the fields for gleaners to harvest, and the strict laws about what meat can be eaten and how it must be slaughtered and prepared, all point to a settled society, one fixed in place and dependent on domesticated crops and animals. An animal that has been hunted is not likely to die without fear or pain. The three festivals of Pesach, Sukkot, and Shavuot were all once agricultural celebrations.

The significance of taking a life, even that of an animal at close quarters, seems borne out by others. Michael Pollan talks about the profound guilt he felt after the initial elation at shooting a boar in Northern California. When I interviewed Stephen Hubbard, he said he had once killed one of their sheep the traditional way, by slitting its throat with a knife.

“It died instantly, it bled out almost immediately once the carotid artery was opened. But holding it like that, yeah, that's getting close to your food.” He has a professional coming this fall to slaughter and dress his sheep. Since it is the hunting season, the butcher is in big demand, and may come on short notice to Chateau Poulet.

“Animal sacrifices ended permanently after the destruction of the second Temple,” Glickman said. “There was no sacrifice during the fifty years after the destruction of the first Temple and the building of the second. You can only have sacrifice if there is a Temple. Instead, we offer up prayers. The idea is that when the Messiah comes, they will rebuild the Temple and start sacrifices again. We rabbis will be out of a job, because the priests, the Cohanim, will take over. At that time, who’ll need rabbis?”

Glickman referred to a book by David Kraemer called *Jewish Eating and Identity Through the Ages*. “The Hebrew word for sacrifice is *Korbanot* – the root is drawing near. When Jews eat today, they are harkening back to the *Korbanot*, the rituals for drawing nearer to God. They do it by telling a story, especially during Passover.

“When we eat the bitter herbs, we recall the plagues in Egypt. When we eat *mazzot*, we re-experience the repression under the Egyptians. We taste the sweetness of freedom, the bitter tears. We enter the story, re-experience the lives of our people. It provides a way to transcend time and space and to touch eternity.”

“This sometimes happens through song and other means.” Glickman recalled hearing a woman sing who had attended the same synagogue as he growing up in suburban Chicago. “That song took me back immediately, it brought back a flood of memory and emotions.

“Food can do that, too. But we bless God, not the food. It is symbolic, pointing to something beyond itself.”

Glickman talked about his upbringing in Illinois. “I grew up in a Reform Jewish household. My mother was descended from German Jews, my father from Eastern European Jews. My great-grandparents on that side were Orthodox, my grandparents Conservative.

“In my father’s childhood, there were three kinds of bread: wheat, rye, and goyashawwhitebread. That’s how they said it, all one word. My uncle, who was a Reform rabbi, had a farm in Illinois. We were not kosher at all.

“In college, I got more religious. I started to refrain from pork, shellfish and cheeseburgers. My approach became ‘I don’t eat it unless I do,’ because in Boston, I would eat lobster. Now, I order fish instead. I no longer feel like I am missing anything. It has attained the ‘ick’ factor.”

This seems to be an important concept in Judaism, the “ick” factor. As my friend in California who is Conservative says “We don’t eat any of those creepy crawly things.” Pollan talks about the ick factor as a basic human survival skill, one that keeps us from eating spoiled meat or things that taste or smell bad. Judaism has extended this reflex to foods that are religiously forbidden.

Glickman sees the laws of *kashrut* as coming directly out of Middle Eastern customs. Included as *kashrut* are fish that swim and have scales, and animals that meet certain criteria. Rules for *halal* in Islam are very similar. Both religions prohibit pork. I tell him that my parents maintained that the rules concerning eating were mostly for health reasons.

“If that were true,” he said, “then these days, pork would be kosher, and schmaltz (chicken fat) would not be. There are people who think this should be the basis for kosher – that healthy food should be kosher, unhealthy food should be unkosher. There is lots of unhealthy kosher food, lots of healthy food that is not.”

This question was recently posed to chef Daniel Barber at a synagogue in New York during the taping of a public radio program, “On Being”. His answer was to tell about a farmer who grew spelt for matzoh. A rabbi had to walk through his field, holding onto the combine as

the farmer drove. When he saw wild garlic, the rabbi stopped the farmer, because it was not kosher.

The farmer tried to figure out why the garlic grew in his field, and found that it was too sulfuric in some places. By allowing his cattle to graze a few days longer on the field, he was able to correct the chemical imbalance, and make his field completely kosher. Barber concluded that in conforming to the laws of *kashrut*, the farmer was growing healthier food.

I recalled my father describing a butcher who had trichinosis, in which a parasite carried by pork is inhaled as tiny eggs by people, then worms hatch out and exit through the skin. The man's arms and hands were covered in scars. That seemed like a perfectly reasonable excuse for not eating pork to me, kosher or not, and I don't eat it. Supposedly, cooking it well kills the parasite.

In Torah, animals without cloven hooves or cud are not considered kosher. Camels and pigs are not kosher, because they do not have rumens, and so do not chew their cud. The camel is not prohibited in Islam, because it was seen as too much of a hardship for those crossing the desert – the last resort is to eat one's camel. The pig is especially disdained because from the outside, it looks like it has a rumen. Only when it is butchered can we see that it is an omnivore. Humans, I discovered through Michael Pollan, cannot digest grass, one of the few food sources we cannot eat directly.

I have my own theory about pork. I suspect that pork was originally prohibited because it cannot be differentiated from human flesh on a plate. German cannibal Armin Meiwes agrees. He is serving a life sentence for killing a man and eating more than 20 kilos of him. In the first television interview after his arrest, Meiwes described how the meat tasted of pork and how he prepared an elaborate meal of human steak in a green pepper sauce with croquettes and Brussels

sprouts. But then, Meiwes insists he's a normal guy. The rabbi refused to comment.

I asked if the same dictates are meant to bring Jews together, and at the same time, separate them from other people. Were the laws of *kashrut* meant for this reason?

"I don't know anyone who refuses to eat kosher food," he answered. "Yes, I think that was on purpose, but that was only part of it. There is a certain amount of xenophobia," he conceded, "that used to be involved." Kraemer says that there is no such thing as Jewish food, that you can only tell a Jew by what he doesn't eat. But food is certainly cultural. Most Jews in the United States are of Eastern European or German ancestry. There are two Sephardic congregations in Seattle, and I have often thought that their potlucks would have more in common with the food I grew up with than the potlucks that are often served on the long table where we sat at Kol Shalom. In fact, one of the ways that people trace Jewish ancestry in the Southwest is through traditional food. Much of it goes back to recipes brought over from Spain by Jews fleeing the Inquisition.

My parents seldom ate pork, citing health reasons, but we are descended from Jews who left Spain during the Inquisition, settling in other countries where it was prudent to keep up the appearance of Catholicism. Many of these families continued some practice of Jewish customs and ritual in the home. Since my grandfather then became a Protestant minister, it is difficult to sort out what was a religious remnant, and what was simply preference.

Wine, on the other hand, cannot be touched by non-Jews during any part of its production if it is to be kosher. "If so, it might become blessed for use in the religious practices of others, *yayn nesekh*. There was also a fear that consuming it might lead to intermarriage. The rabbis

were afraid it could lead to the religious or social downfall of the Jewish people,” Rabbi Glickman said.

Images of wild Babylonian nights came to mind, dancing girls and large quantities of wine served to vulnerable young men who woke up in strange tents, in strange beds, married to women whose language they did not share, much less eating habits.

The use of wine, however, is part of regular religious practice. “We are commanded to drink wine at certain times,” Rabbi Glickman said.

I don’t think any of the farmers on Bainbridge are Jewish, so that rules out Bainbridge kosher wine.

Kosher laws also prohibit the eating of meat and milk together. “I’m not a label reader,” Glickman said. “If I drive through a fast food place and ask for no cheese, and if they put cheese on my burger anyway, first I cuss out the clerk, then I eat it if I am hungry enough.

“I am not as strict as many others,” he continued, “but I find it very meaningful. At events at Kol Shalom, we usually don’t have meat. Keeping *kashrut* is much easier without meat. If some are trying to keep *kashrut* and others are not, it puts everyone in a funny position.”

Only one bakery on the island bakes challah, and someone usually picks up a round of it on Friday for Shabbat services. It was recently discovered that it is made with milk, so it is not *pareve* (neutral). That means those who keep kosher should not eat it with meat.

“There are people who attend services here who are from more conservative backgrounds, aren’t there?” I asked. “Since it is the only synagogue in the area.”

“If it was really important to them,” Glickman responded, “they probably wouldn’t live on Bainbridge Island.

“Prayers and thoughtfulness about food is what makes eating into a Jewish act. If I say a prayer, it makes the meal meaningful to me. It places the act of eating in the context of the sacred. It also places it into a social and cultural context that means, ‘I am eating as a Jewish person.’”

When I was around nine years old, I read all of the Old Testament in my tiny King James Bible. At school, I was delighted to discover that my best friend, Holly, was Jewish. “You’re one of God’s chosen people!” I gushed. She wasn’t sure about that. It turned out that Holly had been raised without any religious awareness. That year, her mother decided to celebrate Passover for the first time in many years, and invited me to join them.

We sat at a little table in the living room of their house. Holly’s father, a silent, unhappy man when he was around, seemed ill at ease. Holly’s mother always tried to get me to call them by their first names, but I was too shy. I didn’t even know my parents had first names until I was older. We were forced to call them Mommy and Daddy long passed any appropriate age. Holly’s mother allowed her to light the candle, then began with the prayers, explaining the meaning of the Seder – the bitter and the sweet, the roasted egg, the apples in honey that signified the mortar out of which Jews built the pyramids as slaves in Egypt. Holly’s older sister, Marleen, who had received religious training when the family lived in Buffalo, New York, jumped in to remind her mother if she forgot anything.

It’s hard to say who was more delighted, me or Holly’s mother. It became obvious that I was the excuse for reviving this practice. Abruptly, Holly’s father stood and left the table. I thought I must have done something wrong, or asked one too many questions.

I did not know until years later that he lost relatives in Lithuania during World War II. For this reason and others he lost his faith, and had forbidden Holly's mother to celebrate the Jewish holidays. A traditional ceremony of affirmation and renewal was, for him, a repository of bad memories, plans gone awry, aspirations never met. For me, it began a long journey into the past and the future.

Sheep Slaughter

The call came at 2:15 in the afternoon. They were due at 2:00 Linda said, but were running late. She was sorry for the abrupt notice. Did I still want to come over?

I pulled on a jacket and jumped in the car. Linda and Stephen of Chateau Poulet were having their sheep slaughtered today. While I have eaten meat all of my life, I have never watched any animal bigger than a chicken prepared for consumption.

When I got there, a wooly sheep was tethered near the drive, struggling with the rope. A man named Kent and someone I knew, Gordon Black, were standing next to it. The sheep, named Confucius, turned and twisted, trying to free himself. Kent is Gordon's neighbor, and he had brought Confucius to meet his end along with four of Linda and Stephen's sheep. Gordon has a station wagon with one of those dog dividers in the back, so he brought Kent and Confucius.

"That's the first time I've had a sheep in my car," he said in his thick Scottish brogue. Gordon is a substitute teacher at the high school.

The day was damp and overcast, and after another phone call establishing that the slaughtering crew was still busy at the north end of the island, we all went inside for tea. As time passed, Kent and Gordon decided to leave Confucius to his fate and went home. There were no emotional goodbyes.

A little after 4:00 p.m., a plain white utility truck pulled into the muddy driveway and positioned itself by the pasture. I went out with Linda and Stephen, who began to collect and tether the four yearlings they had designated for slaughter: Cocoa, Gaucho, Lambretta, and Caramelo. These sheep look different than Confucius. They are Katahdin sheep from

Appalachia, and they have a sparse hair covering, rather than wool like Confucius, who was half hair sheep, half wool sheep. He had been fathered by Linda and Stephen's ram, Obahhhh-ma. As we walked around the pasture, Annie, the pet Nubian goat, went from one human to the other demanding attention. Unlike the sheep, which avoided people, she was very social, staying close, making eye contact, and putting her head under your hand so that she could be petted.

Two middle-aged Mexicans and a young Anglo got out and introduced themselves, then set to work. At that point, Linda excused herself and went back inside. Fred, one of the older men, appeared to be in charge. He carried the .22 rifle. While he began, the other two opened the back of the truck, which had two winches that folded neatly across the doors and swung out from either corner. All three wore bright yellow waterproof aprons and red rubber boots, but no gloves.

Fred asked which one was first. Stephen indicated Confucius, standing right in the drive by the truck. Fred walked around the sheep until he got just the right angle, then delivered a single shot to the back of his head, pointing the rifle almost straight down. The sheep dropped immediately, and Fred pulled one of several knives from a stainless steel scabbard at his waist and severed the sheep's throat so quickly that I missed it. Within three minutes, Confucius had bled out and stopped moving altogether. The youngest worker, blonde and probably not more than nineteen or twenty, put slits behind the tendons of the back legs, fitted hooks from one of the winches in the slits, and hoisted the sheep up. He began to carefully cut the hide away from the legs and work it down the outside of the carcass. I noticed that he had a band aid on one finger. The smell of lanolin rose from the sheep.

Fred went to the next sheep, tethered inside the pasture, and did the same. I watched more closely this time as the sharp blade cut through the throat without effort. Although the second

sheep had witnessed the death of the first, it did not seem aware of any danger, only struggling in annoyance against the rope on its leg. Fred seemed to admire the hair sheep, and I could see for the purposes of slaughter that they were neater and cleaner to work with. I noticed that the male sheep died harder than the one female yearling, going into cardiac arrest about halfway into the bleed, although the brain was long dead.

Annie the goat stayed close to me, curious, but also seemingly unaware that she might be in any danger.

Fred dragged the second sheep out of the pasture, slit its throat, and the third worker got busy. Each sheep was hung upside down from a winch so it could be raised or lowered as the workers butchered. The hides were pulled neatly down and off the heads of the sheep like a sweater, the workers slipping their hands between the body and the skin to loosen the fat that held them together. They dipped their hands in a bucket of water as they worked. They asked if Stephen wanted the skins, and he said no. They were put in a barrel brought along for this purpose. The slightly bluish carcasses were then carefully slit across the lower belly, and the workers reached in and removed the inner organs all in one sac. They asked if Stephen wanted the heads, and he said no. These went in the barrel, along with the intestines. The sheep smell was stronger now, richer, but not repulsive.

Stephen asked them to leave the livers, hearts, and kidneys of each sheep. The rest of the whole carcasses would be taken to a small facility in Port Orchard that specializes in processing meat for hunters and small farmers. There, the meat will be hung for three days in a cooler, then divided into parts and each placed in a box and frozen. Stephen said that the parts of a processed sheep fit in a box about twice the size of a shoebox.

During all of this, Stephen was completely relaxed, moving among the men and sheep talking and joking. The butchers were exceedingly polite, devastatingly efficient in their work. They had been out in the cold drizzle all day, working with razor-sharp knives and no gloves.

Stephen said that he had eaten road kill about three times: once when Linda found a deer that had just been hit on the road near their house, once when he picked up the raccoon, and another time when he and his father found a deer near his parents' place in Stanwood, north of Seattle. His advice was to cook raccoon "a really, really long time" because it is tough.

When they finished, the three workers hung the carcasses in the truck and placed the barrel full of offal inside. They hosed off the aprons, their boots, and the metal holsters holding their knives before closing the doors and folding the winches back up. There was no way to tell what the truck was used for from the outside. The entire process was done by a little after 4:30.

They told Stephen he could pick up his meat after three days.

As I prepared to leave, Stephan asked if I wanted some liver or kidney. I said I didn't know how to cook kidney, but that I liked liver, so I followed him up to the house. There, he and Linda began to divide and freeze the organ meat. He placed about half a liver in a plastic zip-lock bag for me, and I took it home. I was aware that it was still warm as it sat on the car seat next to me.

At home, I prepared the liver in a covered skillet with a sliced leek, some carrots, and a little red wine. Stephen said that they throw almost everything on the grill, but we only fire ours up for salmon. I sautéed a leek and some carrots from the farmers market in olive oil before adding a little Malbec (red wine) and the liver, which I cooked for ten minutes. We ate it with French lentils, salad with Greek olives and crumbled feta, and olive bread. It was good. I had stopped buying calf's liver at the grocery store some years back, in part because it is not carried

as often as when I was a child, but also because I was concerned about the way commercial beef is raised, which I also haven't purchased in a long time. I had seen the pasture where the sheep were raised, and as I cut into it, the liver had no abscesses.

I sent an e-mail to Linda the next day, thanking her. They put their liver on the grill and ate it with potatoes, chanterelles and leeks with half and half, roasted in the oven, and a spinach salad with gorgonzola, avocado, and sunflower seeds.

“So there,” she wrote. “Enjoy.”

Hitchcock

Brendan McGill runs a farm-to-table restaurant, Hitchcock, on Bainbridge Island.

When I arrived, the front door was open, but blocked with a chair. Hitchcock is not open for lunch, only dinners and brunch on weekends. Members of his staff chatted quietly with him while he stood at the bar doing payroll. The only light in the long, narrow space filtered in from the front window. He slipped out for a moment to go to the bank and get the checks printed, and before they left or went to the back of the restaurant to start prep, most of the staff had set their schedules with Brendan for the week.

The restaurant business is a young man's job. "He's the one with all the tattoos," the Fortners said before I came. He had asked them to supply membrillo for the restaurant, but when their bees crashed, the quince trees were not pollinated, and they did not produce the sweet, tart, sticky condiment that I grew up eating in Mexico. Brendan is compact, thirty-something, with a crinkly smile. A veteran of several Seattle restaurants, he has also worked in restaurants in southern Europe.

The entire time that we talked, he took deliveries and directed staff, but did so with aplomb. Persephone Farm delivered greens, and Elysian Beer dropped off a few cases. Each delivery person required a check that Brendan wrote out on the spot.

Hitchcock emphasizes locally grown food, and Brian McWhorter suggested I talk to Brendan. The word is out that he will buy from foragers, so people like Preston of Wild West bring him fresh fish from the boat captains, mushrooms, whatever he's got.

Brendan described Preston as a "fantastic middleman. I'd much rather pay him the mark-up than a retailer." He and the other foragers are "a couple of humans." Brendan clearly relishes

this interaction with the suppliers, the interaction between “a couple of humans” rather than with a large corporation.

I asked Brendan if he had been one of those kids who took over his parents’ kitchen at the age of eight and started cooking. “No,” he says, “I was not a prodigy chef. I started cooking for my roommates when I moved out of my parent’s house at seventeen. I was working in a restaurant, going to art school, trying to figure it all out.”

I ask if either of his parents were chefs. Brendan grew up in Fairbanks, Alaska. His parents had “a fantastic kitchen garden.” He used to go fishing with his father and brothers and bring home “ninety salmon.... I grew up surrounded by examples of good food.”

At the time, his father was a cabinet maker, and his mother a school teacher. His father underwent vocational re-training, and has taught sixth grade for twenty years; his mother is now a school administrator. Both of his parents are fluent in Spanish. “My father lived in Argentina as a kid, and my mother lived in Mexico City for a couple of years.” They have a second home in Ecuador.

The restaurant is named for his wife’s family. Her grandparents were Malvina and Carl Hitchcock, who homesteaded on Bainbridge, and his father-in-law, who died suddenly, was Carl Hitchcock. A black and white Hitchcock family photo decorates each booth in the restaurant. He did not reconfigure the restaurant when he bought it, and uses the wood-fired pizza oven at the back to finish his meats. For now, Hitchcock is “a concept for Bainbridge” – food from farm to table. He remembers “digging clams at Neah Bay” with his in-laws. When he was considering the space he was surprised that, when he talked to farmers, no other restaurant on the island specialized in the farm-to-table concept, although several restaurants make a point of using local suppliers.

There are a couple of farm-to-table restaurants in Seattle, and for around three years there was famously an underground restaurant on Vashon Island, where the chef raised and made all the food, including meat, cheese and butter, then invited up to sixty people at a time out to dine at his farm. We visited once with the Fortners. It was a lovely property, where foodies could stroll through green pastures and meet the cows and the sheep – reminiscent of *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, by Douglas Adams, where the main course introduces itself and invites diners to choose a juicy part and eat it.

Everything was served family style, very simply, at long tables in a former dairy barn. Baskets of fresh bread and crocks of butter were passed around. I recall that the meal was heavy on pork that night, which limited what I ate. I nibbled a tiny bit of blood sausage, just to see how it tasted. It reminded me of eating a scab as a child.

We scattered as a party when we sat down, having to file into narrow benches, and reflecting back, I think I did not enjoy the meal as much as a result. I sat next to strangers with whom I had little in common other than a love of, or curiosity about, food. When I remember visiting Italy six years earlier, almost every dining experience was intensely pleasurable, not just because of the food, but also because I was in the company of friends in an atmosphere of heightened enjoyment. Italians take the communal aspects of food quite seriously. In comparison, the Vashon Island restaurant was monastic.

The idea was not financially feasible in the long run. Each visit was an expensive prospect, including a long drive and a ferry ride to another island. Diners placed a suggested “donation” of \$65.00 plus a tip in a basket at the end of the meal, since the restaurant was not officially licensed. I was happy we visited, but not tempted to return. The owner, Kurt

Timmermeister, recently wrote a memoir, *Growing a Farmer*, perhaps under the delusion that writing would make more money.

Brendan seems to have a very practical approach. “As a restaurant, Hitchcock is a future concept.” It is “totally different than any other organizational system I’ve worked with.” In Seattle, he calls suppliers once a week and takes deliveries the next day. The night before, he decided he needed more produce, and had to call “three farmers, two gardeners, and a forager.” In other words, it’s a lot more work, and he needs to be flexible.

“The menu changes every day.” He showed me the Saturday and Sunday menus, and said they ran out of duck paté by Sunday because it takes three days to make.

For all of his restaurant endeavors, Brendan mostly wants to use local food. “If you read *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* or *Fast Food Nation*, it changes the way you view food.” After spending time cooking in Southwest France, Spain and Italy, he realized the value of cooking and eating locally. “I couldn’t buy an orange in summer in Valencia,” he said, “stupid American. I wanted to taste a Valencia orange, and it was summer. After that, it became ridiculous to have asparagus on the menu in fall.”

“I don’t want a vegetable from Chile on the menu. It just doesn’t make sense at all. I want to eat real food, buy food from a human.”

Brendan reminisced about shopping in the *mercados* of Latin America, the variety of foods available direct from suppliers. In Ecuador, he said, there are little old ladies who act as “fixers,” and will take you through the market, bargaining and purchasing on your behalf. He told me that, even though he knew Spanish from Spain, he had to learn “kitchen Spanish” to talk to the Mexican workers here. More and more, even in Chinese restaurants, I have noticed Mexicans in the kitchen.

Brendan also has a food consulting business in Seattle called Saint Mac. It acts as a catering company, but “mostly as a consultant to other chefs who like what I do.” Dan Barber of Blue Hill Farms, he says, has his own delivery system, with two restaurants. This is the chef I later heard on the radio, talking about kosher food. Brendan sees that as a viable alternative to ordering from the big companies, more responsive to the market and day-to-day needs.

“Community is important in a place like this,” he said. “In Seattle, I can’t get a delivery of Hood Canal clams” except from big companies.

I asked about the economics of food, something that had puzzled me since I began this exploration. Why is a locally-grown tomato so much more expensive than one trucked in from California?

“It’s a lifestyle difference,” Brendan said. “For someone to have a First World lifestyle and sell you tomatoes, pay for the farmer’s market stall, the truck, etc., they have to charge \$4 a pound. In the supermarket, you are buying a tomato grown in a giant field, tomatoes as far as you can see, all tomatoes, or canning tomatoes. They employ questionably paid workers. The tomatoes are picked unripe, put in a warehouse pumped full of CO², put in a truck, and distributed through Con Agra or Charlie’s Produce. The tomatoes are cheap, and have wax on them. They are cheap because the growers can consolidate their costs. The whole system is propelled by petroleum.”

And he was just getting warmed up. “Why is a burger at home more expensive than at McDonald’s?” he asked. “Because they cheat, and because of the quantity.”

Brendan admires the business acumen of people like Tom Douglas, who runs five or six restaurants in Seattle, each with a different emphasis, such as Greek food, seafood, or pizza.

“I made a business model, and have blown those projections out of the water. If I can tighten up costs, I will make a profit.”

The focus at Hitchcock is on the servers. Brendan wants them knowledgeable about the food and wine, but to be unobtrusive otherwise. He worked at a bar while a student at the Art Institute in Seattle. It was during the days of the dot-com boom, when people were living high and fast, ordering Cristal (the \$300-a-bottle champagne celebrated in hip-hop anthems). All he did was offer drinks, and they did the rest. This was in direct contrast to his experience working in hotel restaurants in Alaska that catered to cruise ship tourists. There, he was expected to spend a lot of time describing the food and interacting with the customers.

During the first months Hitchcock was open, everyone had something to say – about the décor, the food. They would point out that they had eaten in restaurants in Europe.

“You can’t outsnob me,” said Brendan, “I’ve worked in first-rate restaurants all over the world. You either enjoy it or you don’t.”

“People also make suggestions along the lines of if you are going to make it out here....”

But most people just say thanks.

Who eats here? I asked. I’ve eaten at Hitchcock a couple of times, including once before I knew I would write about it. The food is excellent, but not inexpensive. Still, it is less than one would pay for the same meal in Seattle. We don’t eat out that much. The restaurants on Bainbridge are always packed, so you need a reservation as a rule. Also, eating out is expensive in general, so we tend to save it for when we travel or entertain guests.

“Local residents and Seattle destination diners. There is some Poulsbo and Silverdale action, but Bainbridge Island is not the center of action for the county. People don’t wander in,”

he said. “We keep our overhead low, the landscaping simple.” By landscaping, he seemed to mean the décor.

“We see Seattle customers referred from the concierges at the W Hotel, among others.” He has done a couple of big concierge dinners, which is how restaurants get referrals from the hotels.

Brendan’s biggest challenge right now is to get his costs down. He is trying to make friends, he said, while not pricing himself out of the market. They serve fresh pasta daily, and house-made charcuterie.

The first time I dined there was with my husband and son, who is sadly, more of a guest now, since he became a college student in California. We each ordered something different: I had half a chicken with white cabbage slaw, aioli and ruby crescent potatoes, Ben ordered the confit duck leg, cous-cous & squash salad with mostarda, a condiment made from the leavings of wine-making, and my husband ate a big salad of arugula, lemon, pine nuts olive oil and Pecorino Romano that he kept urging us to taste. The predominant spices were salt and lemon, allowing the natural flavors to shine through. For appetizers, we split a plate of paté and ordered manchego cheese with strawberry preserves. There was so much rich food I took half of my half a chicken home.

“We are getting good blog stuff. I am holding off on a press package or soliciting attention in Seattle. Much of our staff also works in Seattle,” and people he knows from other restaurants in Seattle recommend the restaurant. ”It’s a big network, more like a family.”

At one point, Brendan apprenticed with Joseba Jimenez y Jimenez at his original restaurant in Seattle, Harvest Vine. “He was a pioneer in Seattle” for fresh, local food, and Brendan considers him a mentor

“If he wanted to serve pimientos, he would go to Spain, find the seeds, then find the right microclimate in California, have a farmer grow the seeds for him, and Fed-Ex the peppers to him.”

After the breakup of his marriage and partnership, Jimenez left the area for awhile, but is back working at The Swinery as director of operations. “He’s looking for the right opportunity to start his next venture.”

More and more, Seattle has become a place where young chefs come to develop their careers. Our abundance of fresh, local food and low overhead, compared to New York or Los Angeles, means a hard-working chef has a chance to make a mark on the culinary world. We are friends with a young chef in Seattle named Maria Hines, originally from San Diego, who has followed the same path as Brendan, apprenticing with well-known chefs and working her way through the system. She received a James Beard Award a couple of years ago. The restaurant business is dominated by male egos, much like architecture, but Maria is patient and hard-working, and recently opened her own restaurant in the Wallingford district of Seattle, Tilth, also emphasizing fresh, local food.

Because Brendan buys from foragers, there is a constant stream of notes and phone calls left for him. He showed me one: 10 # tomatoes, vine ripe (phone number).

He said that a lot of people with kitchen gardens start to think they like the idea of being in the produce business, and so get a Universal Business Identification Number. Like the farmer’s market, it attracts a certain type of romantic, people smitten by the idea of fresh food and vegetables, chatting with farmers and chefs and being paid big money to stand around in the sunshine and have fun, just like the people at the farmers market.

“I trade gift certificates for mushrooms,” he says, “that people find while out walking their dogs.”

Diners are “still not thinking all the way within the season.” Even knowing that he serves local food, he says, people are surprised that he does not serve decaf espresso, or carry artificial sweeteners such as Nutrasweet or Splenda. He does serve coffee, however, so this is more about Brendan’s standards for food quality than about local production or seasonality.

I asked him what he wished would grow on Bainbridge. Brendan sighed. “For the sake of this restaurant,” he said, “olives and citrus.”

“But I don’t want to bring a mango, a date or a fig in here,” he added. “If I have to cook with tropical fruit, I will open a restaurant in Maui.”

Should I tell him about the fig trees on Bainbridge? He will figure it out. Like Brian McWhorter, Brenda McGill seems to understand that taking control of the source is an important part of a successful business, both in terms of efficiency and quality. I don’t know if he would stretch his definition of farm-to-table to include fruits and vegetables grown in Nayarit, Mexico, by a farmer based on Bainbridge Island. But if his customers want it, the quality is good, and the supply is dependable, I suspect he would.

Living as a Farmer

I asked Betsey who I should talk to about wine. Until recently, it would have been Gerard and Joanne Bentryn, co-founders of Bainbridge Winery, the only vintners who exclusively use grapes grown on the island. But Joanne had just undergone a mastectomy this, and Gerard underwent brain surgery last March to remove a tumor from his pituitary gland. Their son Ian, a local naturalist and writer, has started his own pruning business. Betsey now acts as the primary winemaker.

A businessman recently approached Betsey about partnering in the winery. It turns out he really wanted a brewery, and saw this as a way in. He hadn't checked the zoning, and included Betsey in his LLC. She took the paperwork to a lawyer, and discovered that her business interest should be separate, and she should be given some equity.

It turned out that one of my earlier questions to Betsey had been very important to her. "I asked Russ who his heroes were, and he said Joel Salatin (of Michael Pollan fame) and Ayn Rand. I realized he might not be the best person for me to work with. He never asked my heroes. While he (and another) were here, I was pruning vines. Neither of them offered to help prune. I'm a collaborator."

Betsey wants to reformulate Bainbridge Winery as an educational institution. The Bentryns support that. "People don't see wine grown. That's what we're missing."

According to *Capital Press*, a weekly agricultural online newspaper that Betsey reads, the main competition is from South America and South Africa. Europe has overproduction right now. "When Bainbridge Winery started, a bottle was \$8. Now it is \$15 - \$20," Betsey said, "but it should be \$30." I checked in T & C later, where I found the Bainbridge wines for \$15 - \$24.

When I returned a second time to Laughing Crow Farm, Betsey had just finished feeding breakfast to four laughing young interns, all women. They have that same glow of rude good health as Betsey, clearly people who thrive in the damp fields all day. All are local except one from Portland. There is one male farming intern on the island this year, at Tanith Farm. All are college graduates, and this is considered post-graduate education, the first step towards making the sorts of decisions, lifestyle choices, and long-term investments required of a farmer. Every farmer I talked to had at least an undergraduate degree.

Without leaving the dining room table, the interns passed out an assortment of kitchen bowls and began to sort heads of garlic. They would break them into 9,000 cloves to be planted as garlic starts. The smaller ones are set aside, because small starts grow small garlic bulbs. All the garlic heads had a rose-colored peel and were large, as garlic goes. The names were Rosewood and Chesnek Red; Its “Purple Stripe” variation wins flavorful “best baked garlic” contests, according to the *Filaree Farm 2006* garlic catalog Betsey handed me, along with a book called *Growing Great Garlic*, by Ron L. Engeland.

Garlic, it turns out, grows easily in our rocky soil, but it takes a lot of fertilizer. This year, Betsey used her own manure pile from the three horses and the chickens she keeps. Now she wants her own manure spreader. I’ll bet her family in New Jersey loves her Christmas lists.

Betsey’s farmhouse has stacks of publications about farming scattered around the living room and up the stairs as far as I could see. Some of the interns live in the main house, and a couple in a trailer parked nearby. Very Paonia, as my husband and I say, after the town where we lived and worked in the 1970s and 80s. It was populated by fruit farmers, coal miners, and marijuana dealers, with a sprinkling of urban refugees and those determined to survive “The Big

One,” or people who were some combination of the above. We knew people with expensive backpacks who lived in packing sheds, or more often, had no visible means of support.

Although I knew about the Bainbridge Winery, I hadn’t planned to write about wine growing on the island, because I did not think of wine as a food necessary for survival. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that no food from off the island would also mean no medicine from off the island, and a significant percent of the medicines people take are for pain. When I researched my book about old Tucson, set in the late 1800s, drinking was a big issue, and the cause of many of the city’s sorrows. But in a rough and tumble frontier town alcohol, often the main ingredient of patent medicines, was probably the only relief from toothache, arthritis, and other common ailments. If Bainbridge Island had to grow its own food, it would also have to grow its own medicine.

The Bentryns started the wine business on Bainbridge Island over 35 years ago. Earlier farmers planted grape vines in Grapeview, a community farther west, and near Mount Baker, in the Cascade Mountains north and east of Seattle.

Both Gerard and Joanne are originally from New Jersey. Gerard worked on satellite technology, and upon being drafted was sent to Germany to work on missiles. There, the Bentryns became enamored of the process of local food. “You can see everything you eat out of the window,” Gerard told Betsey, including small vineyards. When they returned to the States, Gerard worked for the National Park Service, which he found “completely bureaucratic,” but the two of them volunteered at wineries, and learned how to make wine.

When Bentryn was transferred to the West Coast, he bought the property on Bainbridge for its similarity to the region in Germany he had grown to love. The wines grown there were more delicate, more fragrant, and had a lower alcohol content than wines from farther south. The

Bentryns started their winery at a location just north of my house, across the ravine in a natural bowl with an open, south facing slope. Fifteen years ago, when we arrived, Gerard Bentryn was a very visible and vocal member of the Bainbridge community, hoping to shape land use policy in his favor, and encouraging support for local business. The Bentryns moved the winery to Day Road ten years ago and sold the original land to developers. It is now a collection of homes and condominiums called Vineyard Lane, connected to my Cave Avenue neighborhood by a footpath and a bridge across the ravine.

The Bentryns have one of the earliest bonded numbers for winemakers in the state. They worked with Dr. Robert Norton at the Washington State University Experimental Station in Mt. Vernon to find grapes that would work here, and rather than using California grapes, ended up importing varieties from Europe: Siegerebbe, Müller-Thurgau, and Madelaine Ingevine. Those are still growing, plus varieties of pinot noir and pinot gris that can tolerate our wet climate. Betsey noted that most of the wine industry in Oregon is along the coast, not in arid eastern Oregon.

While Betsey talked to me, she continued to direct the interns. She mapped out garlic-planting work for the rest of the day, and promised that each of them would get to drive the tractor. They will rototill an area to plant with a cover crop. If she had time, Betsey said, she would use the horses. The Rototiller will chop more, because the blades are circular. The disk pulled by the horses just flips the soil. It is uneven because there is only one disk. There's a thing called a spader that will flip it, and a different machine that is popular in Europe.

“There is a method called no-till which we should probably do.” It simply crimps the cover crop with a heavy roller. It is challenging to kill the cover crop without turning it under.

Akio fertilized a different area, she said, than she had wanted, and so she had to adjust for that as well.

As the interns pulled on their boots and scattered to their duties, we walked by the two young draft horses, now in a paddock attached to the purple shed. Betsey had purchased them conscious that Samantha was getting old. They are shorter than Samantha, but wide. Called Suffolk draft horses, they are two years old. They will get even fatter as they get older. Like Samantha before them, the horses seemed indifferent to our presence, regally keeping themselves at the far end of the paddock.

Betsey said this had been the toughest year for grapes in the twenty years she has worked with them. It is labor intensive, like all farming. “We want food, but we don’t want to do the work.”

I asked if strawberries could ever be grown on the island again. “Maybe we could grow strawberries,” she said, “but there is a fungus that has built up in the soil. We’ve got to get really savvy about crop rotation, learn to grow organisms that will replace the fungus.” That’s true of most organic farming. Farmers used to use nicotine and copper. Back to the earth means back to seasons, native, indigenous connections. “The fact that we are bringing animals back into agriculture is a good sign.”

Since then, a gardening columnist has written that using horse manure is not a good idea unless it is hot-composted, because it re-introduces weeds, and can encourage root rots including *phytophthora*. Sounds like a job for Olaf Ribeiro.

We walked through a patch of clover, often used for a cover crop. Our house in Colorado was surrounded by fields of onions and clover during the winter months. The cows were brought in to deliver their white-faced calves in March and April, then moved up to the high country

while the fields grew corn that would be processed into feed. Twice a year there was a cattle drive, complete with cowboys, down our gravel road.

“Farming is getting to be more holistic,” she said “and the interest in small farming gives me hope. None of the interns are from agricultural backgrounds.” Betsey’s father was a fireman.

“We are beginning to get it, partly because restaurant chefs have brought the concept of farm-to-table to light, but we are not there yet. There has been an evolution in thought.”

This reminded me of one of Bob Fortner’s early comments about his and Nancy’s journey to farming: “The evolution of none of this was planned.” It made me think that as we have learned more about our food, our health and how we can take a more active role in improving our environment, the restaurants and grocery stores have evolved along with us. No part of this would be possible without the other parts.

We were now at one of the vineyards, at a higher point than Betsey’s Laughing Crow property. We looked back towards the entrance to the Day Road Farms, at the northern edge of the properties, where a yellow school bus had just pulled up and children were disembarking to explore the farmlands.

The vines, with their broad, hand-shaped leaves, grow on open fencing strung between sturdy posts to just above head height, about six feet. Because the Bentryns were both ill this year, and the dark, wet summer was hard on the grapes, there was no grape harvest, and the birds were allowed to eat the fruit off the vines. Traditional Jewish farming practices, I mentioned, call for the fields to be left fallow every seven years. Betsey did not know that. I think it gives the soil time to recover and restore nutrients, things that farmers might have known once, but forgot in more recent times as we became dependent on chemicals after World War II.

A few other wine endeavors on the island participated in “grape crush,” the annual grape picking and crushing held each fall. Typically, Bainbridge Vineyards would have hired migrant pickers who work the area, a floating population of mixed Filipinos and First Nation from Canada created when the mateless Filipino farmers in the area married First Nation women. A few volunteers work as well, as an organized crop mob, but “Volunteers don’t transfer knowledge,” Betsey said.

This syncretic Filipino/First Nation culture also has permanent residents on Bainbridge. I was struck by the recent obituary of Florentino “Sonny” Tabafunda, who died in a car accident. His father, Paul, had emigrated to Bainbridge from the Philippines to work in the strawberry fields. One of nine children, Tabafunda spent much of his youth working on his family’s farm. Tabafunda’s relationship to people was expressed through his cooking, for which he was renowned.

“Following in his father’s footsteps, Tabafunda would host lavish barbeques, in which whole goats and pigs were spit-roasted for family and friends....” According to *The Bainbridge Review*,

“Chicken adobo and all the good stuff,” his wife said. “He did most of the cooking. He did that for me.”

When the Bentryns started, not very many Americans drank wine. “Over the last ten years, the industry has really exploded,” Betsey said. People drank liquor and beer, but didn’t really see wine as coming from the land. “It is very specific to place, and one must finish wines differently. It is tied to the history of a place. It was originally a way of holding a juice and processing it to use all year round.”

The introduction of wine as a consumable commodity in the United States came about primarily through the marketing of California wines. Oregon has more agriculture on the west side of the state because there was no Columbia River Basin project, as in Washington State. Betsey has referred several times in our conversations to the books, *A River Lost*, by Lynn Bragg and Virgil Marchand, which documents the losses of the Colville Confederated Tribes with the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam; and *Cadillac Desert, The American West and Its Disappearing Water*, by Marc Reisner, which includes an account of the shifting of water from Western to Eastern Washington and the resulting agricultural emphasis east of the Cascades. Now, water and labor are cheaper, because subsidized, in Eastern Washington.

My parents didn't drink, so I knew little about the wine industry in California. They were still trying to deal with the fact that Jesus turned water into wine at the marriage in Cana. To be fair, both had alcoholics in the family and good reasons to avoid liquor that matched their religious beliefs. My father's teen years were hard as a result of an alcoholic stepfather. In our home, an alcoholic was called a wino, and anyone who drank at all was considered an alcoholic. I think most people the age of my parents drank mixed drinks, but an upscale wine industry did not start until later.

Since then, growers such as Chateau San Michele, now owned by a smokeless tobacco company, have said that it is too wet to grow wine in Western Washington as a way to promote their own wines.

I asked Betsey, really, how this little patch of grapevines could be made to work economically. "Educating people about food is a long-term process," she answered. "There is a huge proliferation of wineries bringing grapes over from Eastern Washington. Right now,

consumer taste is for heavy reds, but wineries want to offer the full range.” The pinot noir grapes have been in at the Bainbridge Winery since the late 1980s, and the first harvest was in 1992.

I asked if they had considered raisins. They can grow huge seedless crops, she said, but it is not dry enough here to process raisins. My freshman year roommate at Stanford had been the granddaughter of the man who invented the chemical process for drying raisins. I figured Betsey would object to the artificial process.

The climate closest to that of Bainbridge is that of the Loire Valley of France. The amount of rain is almost identical. “We are drier during the growing season, and wetter in the winter. We prune each vine down to two canes, called ‘cane pruning.’ It is a procedure used more in the north, compared to ‘spur pruning,’ used in warmer areas.” Cane pruning, Betsey said, takes more skill.

Gerard and Joanne are in their seventies, and trying to find the right transition for their property and their work in order to retire. They have talked to a couple of groups interested in taking over Bainbridge Vineyards, but those groups did not connect with Betsey, who is 52 years old. Although she looks much younger, her hands and fingers are thickened from years of working the soil.

There is a new group interested in acquiring the Vineyards for educational purposes. “Kids don’t have very many opportunities to go outside,” Betsey said. The group is a nonprofit called Global Source Education. It already runs an in-school program in which Betsey and other farmers, including Brian McWhorter, participate. Jon Garfunkel, the managing director, sees folding the vineyard and winery into Global Source’s focus of “reconnecting adults with the land and teaching the younger generations about the importance of knowing where food comes from.”

When the island was incorporated as a city, Betsey worked to merge city and county laws in order to protect agricultural zoning. Lobbying is relentless work, and involves a lot of indoor meetings. As she became less politically active, she invested more in farming. “This is my activism now.” She does landscape pruning to make extra money, and teaches people “how to take care of stuff.”

After college, Betsey was offered an extension job in Philadelphia. She didn’t like the people there, and decided to come west for two years. That’s when she took the bicycle trip that changed her life. She could have worked for Weyerhaeuser, a big timber concern in Washington State. She looked for jobs in horticulture, and was hired at Town & Country Nursery, not affiliated with the grocery store, by Junkoh and Chris Harui. At the time, it was located near the corner of Highway 305 and High School Road. Betsey worked for them for four years, and they asked her to become the nursery manager.

When the area behind it was developed, bringing the Safeway supermarket, the nursery moved to Harui’s father’s old place and was renamed Bainbridge Gardens, out where the Nakatas and Ed Loveritch were working when they first hatched their market scheme. It is a beautiful place, soothing to visit in rain or sun, but we all miss Junkoh, who passed away in 2008.

Betsey preferred to work the land and went to work for the Bentryn’s. As a farmer she “Can’t go on vacation because you are working your ass off until 10:00 p.m. at night. If local farm production is not in the public mindset as a different product,” she concluded, in answer to many of my questions, “then it can’t survive.” She sent me home with a paper bag full of garlic starts that were too small to plant. They were still huge – sweet, mild, barely matching my definition of garlic in their flavor. All this garlic should make me well, right? I wish.

The Locavore's Dilemma

Almost everyone I talked to advocated eating local for a variety of reasons – to save on transportation costs, be less dependent on oil, support local economies, support local, small-scale farmers; because it is healthier, because if we eat locally, we will “know the story” of our food, and so be more connected to it, and more connected to the place where we live.

"Many stewards in this book... practice conservation — some out of necessity, all out of respect for their natural surroundings, as they consciously live a sustainable lifestyle in the midst of an affluent and wasteful consumer-oriented culture. Caring for one's own land will undoubtedly assume an even greater importance as our population increases and privately owned open space disappears," says Charles Schmid in *Island Stewards*.

No one said it was cheaper. The rabbi did not say it brought you closer to God. And, I found, it is not better for my health.

For at least ten years I have suffered from a potentially fatal condition. In September of 2007 my doctor called to say my cholesterol level was an astounding 300. I found this infuriating. I eat healthy food, I walk a lot, and at the time, was attending yoga classes twice a week. “I can control this,” I told her. “I can bring my cholesterol down through diet.”

I knew even then that there were factors out of my control. My mother passed away after having a serious stroke, recovering, and having a second stroke in the same part of her brain. She then lingered for eight years in a nursing home, unable to move, and eventually unable to speak. She died slowly and painfully.

Her father died of “hardening of the arteries,” arteriosclerosis, which we now know is caused by a build-up of fat. His wife, my grandmother, was half Opata Indian, a group closely

related to the Tohono O'odam who now suffer from the highest incidence of diabetes in the world, along with heart disease and high cholesterol. Diabetes also occurs in my family, although I do not have it. Instead, I suffer from hypoglycemia, the inability to metabolize sugar efficiently. That means I pass out if I don't eat, or if I eat too much sugar at once.

Since I don't suffer from obesity, eat well and exercise, my doctor agreed that my high cholesterol was most likely genetic. Nevertheless, she agreed to let me try to bring it under control through diet. I cut out all butter, almost all cheese, and most eggs. I also baked less, since good baking involves sugar, butter, and eggs. Not that I baked that much to begin with.

My cholesterol came down to between 230 and 240, and hovered there. The total number, arrived at by combining three separate measures of good cholesterol, hdl, bad cholesterol, ldl, and triglycerides, is supposed to be under 200. My doctor put me on a diet involving dark chocolate, pistachio nuts, and plant statins in the form of butter substitutes. I was skeptical, but willing to give it a try. At least I liked dark chocolate. I immediately gained five pounds, but my cholesterol did not budge. A year and a half later, I went on statins for the first time and brought my cholesterol down to 210. Then it began to creep up, and Dr. Rayl doubled the dosage.

The reason I was skeptical of the chocolate and pistachio diet is that I had read Gary Nabhan's book, *Why Some Like it Hot* (G. Nabhan). An ethnobotanist I met while working on an earlier book, Nabhan has made a life-long study of the plants of the desert Southwest, and the people who cultivate, eat and use them. My Indian ancestors were farmers along the river valleys of Arizona and Sonora, and many of the plant names are in the original language. He works with the Tohono O'odam and has shown that returning to an indigenous diet dramatically improves their health. The same is true for Hawaiian natives who return to a local diet.

Nabhan also visited the village in Crete that is the original home of the famous Mediterranean Diet calling for lots of fish and olive oil. He discovered that he was unable to tolerate as much olive oil in his system as the natives, and most other people cannot, either. In other words, these dietary modifications are gene-specific, and cannot be transferred between populations.

During a recent talk by Nabhan at the University of Washington , he advocated eating a local, sustainable diet. The auditorium was packed with people interested in his ideas, including many students dedicated to creating an environmentally sustainable world, starting with their own lives.

In the question and answer period, a young woman asked how she could eat traditionally when she lives a long way from her place of origin. This was my question, too: If I have a genetically Southwest body, and live in the Northwest, how can I eat food that is healthy for me and still eat locally and sustainably? I eat fish about twice a week, chicken, and gave up beef over twenty years ago because I could not eat it while I was pregnant; its origins seemed increasingly suspicious after that, with *E. coli* scares on a regular basis, and limited availability of locally produced beef. Besides, isn't it animal fats that supposedly drive up cholesterol?

Nabhan's answer to the student was to find local equivalents. Of Lebanese ancestry, Nabhan has sought out food in the Tucson area that fills the same niches as the food of his ancestors. For fava beans, he substitutes tepary beans. He raises his own churro sheep and heritage turkeys. Nabhan has successfully merged his work and his lifestyle to create a sustainable ecosystem for a person whose ancestors came from a desert, and who now lives in a desert.

I love the food here. I am happy to eat locally, and over the next year, may even try to eat more seasonally, not demanding a salad in February, but hopeful that some form of greens will be available. As I learned while interviewing the staff and management at Town & Country, much of the food on Bainbridge Island is brought from California and sold as “Northwest” food. In reading *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver, about her year of eating locally in Virginia, she found California produce as far away as Quebec; it truly is the breadbasket of the continent, growing luscious food year-round in the Central and Coachella valleys. However, “the agribusiness in California is among the most costly in dollars and energy in the world,” Nabhan says. This is true not only in terms of human cost, as Betsey Wittick, Sallie Maron and Brendan McGill emphasized, but in terms of natural resources.

In addition to the petroleum used in transportation, “Even if you don’t live in California, if you’ve ever eaten Blue Diamond almonds or Muir Glen organic tomatoes, Dole asparagus or Bunny Luv baby carrots, Corn Nuts or Earthbound lettuce... you are a California water user. Which, at a rough tally makes about 309 million of us,” according to Matt Jenkins in *High Country News*.

Now that consumer awareness of pesticides and fertilizers is driving demand for organic food, the California farmers are responding to that market as well. I hope it results in better working conditions for the people who are in the fields every day, but our insistence on cheap food, while making it increasingly difficult for workers to even stay in this country, much less make a living, is becoming increasingly unsustainable across the food chain.

I can also buy mangoes from Mexico, and grapes from Chile. The Town & Country definition of Northwest does not stretch that far, but demand does.

I also wonder about the idea that, before the white man arrived, people ate exclusively from the land in their immediate vicinity. There is evidence in the Southwest that the Nahuatl in Central Mexico traded jade and feathers with Pueblo people from the north for turquoise and buffalo hides. The buffalo hides would have come from trade between the Pueblos and the Indians of the Central Plains, at least the east side of the Rockies. Might food have been traded the same way? There is evidence that seeds were.

My Suquamish neighbors across Agate Pass once set up their summer camps on Bainbridge to clam and fish. They dug camas roots along the lakes on the Kitsap Peninsula and mixed the resulting flour with dried salmon to make portable fish cakes. Plants were gathered and eaten fresh or dried for preservation as food, spice and medicine. Many of the tribes of the Northwest had winter lodges that were disassembled while they were gone, then reassembled when they returned from their voyages to neighboring lands and villages. Even today, native people, or mixed people like Sonny Tabafunda, have relatives spread from here to the Queen Charlotte Islands in Canada due to travel and intermarriage.

So what does eating locally, eating sustainably, eating a healthy diet mean? Is it confined to a romanticized version of how we might live, if only everything were available here? No one seems to advocate eating a strictly indigenous diet, even if it were possible. Nabhan says that “Salmon Nation,” as he calls it, has one of the highest occurrences of foods that can be sustainably foraged. “Although we typically think of local or regional food communities as being focused on accessing place-based crops, the Pacific Northwest is perhaps *the* ecosystem with the most wild food.”

But we also eat lots of grains and foods originally from Europe or Latin America, such as corn, wheat, tomatoes and potatoes. In fact, the Ozette potato still grown out on the coast was

brought directly from Peru to the Northwest, according to Nabhan, without detouring through Europe; the Spaniards sailed up the west coast and introduced it to the Makah tribe.

In my refrigerator right now is Gulf shrimp, a regional, free-range organic chicken, ground lamb, (which is almost always local, since there is low demand for it), a head of lettuce, probably from California, and potatoes from either the next door neighbor or Betsey Wittick, along with her garlic. There is frozen molé and turkey from Thanksgiving that I will break out this week, and a moldering piece of cooked yam that my husband said he would eat, but has not. I think I will have to get rid of it.

There are frozen lima beans and corn that we mix and eat as succotash, frozen orange juice, agave juice that was probably concentrated then reconstituted, cheese, milk and a lot of apples from Eastern Washington, just like those I was able to buy in Central Mexico last summer. There should be more, but I need to get groceries. It is December.

So why don't I rip up the lawn and plant some vegetables, build a chicken tractor and buy some fuzzy little chicks?

Well, first off, there are the covenants in my neighborhood. We are not supposed to keep livestock or chickens, or build permanent outbuildings. A couple of my neighbors have kept chickens off and on anyway, but along with my edict against naming one's food, I will have to add "birds always meet a bad end." I'm sorry, but that's just what happens.

Then there are my trees. I love my trees, and it seems as though every time I turn around, I am defending them from wind, developers, or talk of widening our street. Because of the trees on our west and south sides, the only place that receives any sunlight to speak of is our front yard, which receives only morning sun. It is mostly covered by a lawn that was installed with the building of the house around 1980. It was laid down with a tough, nylon mesh that keeps the soil

in place. We have ignored it, hoping that moss would eventually displace the grass my husband mows when it gets out of hand, but that hasn't happened. Under the grass is the worst soil you can imagine. As my conversations with farmers have shown, all the soil on the island needs to be amended in order to grow food.

If I managed to rip up the lawn and its nylon mesh, I could not fence the yard to keep the neighborhood dogs out. There is a covenant against fencing our front yards, meant, I suppose, to create a more neighborly ambiance. Some of the dogs run loose, fewer than when I moved here fifteen years ago and became the Dog Grinch of the Neighborhood.

Then there is my back. This is another health problem, one that on a day to day basis affects the quality of my life more than having high cholesterol. About ten years ago, I felt a tingling sensation in my neck and upper back while on a June outing with my family. This turned to numbness of my arms and hands, followed by excruciating pain. I dragged myself into the clinic a couple of times, where the doctors shrugged and said they did not know what was wrong with me. They offered pain killers that I am either allergic to or don't work. Recently, a doctor said I probably damaged the long thoracic nerve that runs under my right shoulder blade, and nerves don't heal.

So intensive gardening is probably not on the program. I have recovered enough to do a moderate amount of yard work. I would probably have to hire someone to pull up my lawn and till and fertilize the soil, at least the first time, before the neighborhood dogs descended on my pea patch, to say nothing of the deer.

Since my family is from Mexico, people assume they were all farmers. This is not the case. The closest person to the land I can find is my great-grandfather, who bought unbroken horses and trained them to pull carriages in Central Mexico. During the Revolution, the family

lost what land it had, and came north to the United States to work for the railroad. There is a photo of Ambrosio and his family in which they look pretty capable of taking care of themselves. Unlike languid portraits of the upper classes, this one pulses with intensity, as though it is difficult for them to sit still. My great-grandmother holds a muff, dangling four little hooves, and we like to speculate on what kind of an animal the fur once encased. When things calmed down, most of them returned to Mexico and settled in a larger city, Aguascalientes, where they became teachers, pianists, a theatre director, and other arts-related workers.

In living memory, my father probably had the most affinity for farming. He grew up in a poor, unincorporated town outside of Redlands, California. Most of his neighbors dropped out of school to pick oranges, leaving him the only Mexican to graduate from high school that year. Unable to get work, he ended up through a lucky fluke as a scholarship student at Redlands University during the Depression, eventually becoming a Methodist minister. He taught social studies in the public schools most of my life, but loved to work outside in the heat. During the 60s, I think he relished the respite from human drama. We had squash and fruit trees on our large, urban lot, and a few kitchen herbs. Maybe it reminded him of his mother's garden.

Surprisingly, one of my sisters became a farmer. In the 1975, her father-in-law suffered a heart attack, and she and her husband moved to North Dakota to help out. After a year or two it became clear that this was a permanent job, although my sister also returned to school and taught freshman comp along the way.

Scott and Aida farm 2800 acres with two or three people and a combine. Sometimes they hire an extra hand. They grow pinto and soy beans, corn and wheat for the commodities markets. A local coop helps them engage in "forward contracting" at the beginning of each season, which provides cash, and the rest is sold on the open market. If the crop is a failure, they owe money

back, although they take out crop insurance. “Don’t you watch the Hefty Brothers?” my sister asked. “They have a television program called Ag, PhD.” I don’t think the stations here carried it.

This type of farming is described in *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* – too large and specialized to be considered subsistence, too small to take many losses. They embrace the use of chemicals and genetically modified seed as the only way to insure success. Farming in North Dakota only resembles farming on Bainbridge Island in that, at some point, seeds are put into the ground and plants emerge.

As a result of my exploration of food on Bainbridge, we plan to take a little control over its sources this year. The neighbors have offered me the use of one of their raised beds, since Neil plans to sail all summer. In Seattle, I had grown sweet yellow tomatoes that were bell-shaped, so I will look for those again. I will certainly try to grow carrots. We are also looking into splitting a CSA share that will feed four people. At least four, maybe five farms are offering CSA shares right now, and we will need to sign up before they are all sold out. Happily, our son, now a software engineer, has finally taken an interest in cooking and sometimes calls me for recipes.

Say you live in a temperate, maritime climate. One day, out of the blue, the ferry sinks to the bottom of Puget Sound, and the bridge across Agate Pass falls down. You are on an island with 21,000 other people, assuming they all made it back from their jobs in Seattle. If it was during the day, they did not. Power is down, of course. Eventually, the cars will run out of fuel, the generators at T & C will give up, and you will need to affirm yourself as a member of the community worthy of having something to eat.

A few months earlier, several hundred people joined you from another country, and were settled on the only flat ground on the island, Battle Point Park, where tents and portable toilets were set up. When it became clear that we would need to share our limited resources, there was some resentment of the refugees. But the new people, or the old people, I forget which, divided the park into rice paddies, restored the nearby creeks so the salmon would run again, and planted mulberry trees from tiny starts, the only food for silkworms,

You will dig up the lawn. You will plant pieces of a potato you found at the bottom of the refrigerator when you cleaned it out. You will try to figure out what part of the salal plant is edible, and how to fix it. One day, you will follow a deer for hours through the ravine, taking note of what plants it pauses to eat, and which ones it passes by. You will scour the beaches for clams, and start eyeing that squirrel in the yard in a new light. The neighbor's dogs will cease to be a problem, because the neighbors will have eaten them.

You will try to defend your hundred-foot Douglas firs, but eventually the neighbors will prevail, and the trees will be cut down for heating and cooking. The road will not be widened.

Most likely, you and your neighbors will form a co-op, the kind that meets and takes hours to decide anything, in order to distribute food and other necessities. Fortunately, the neighborhood includes two doctors, an emergency room nurse, and a baker. Once we realize how much time and labor it takes to grow food, we will become quiet and work.

Across the island, we will probably form specialty co-ops, or guilds – canning, cheese making, winemaking, herbs and tinctures, and beekeeping will be developed as specialties, to be traded between groups. The latter guild, unfortunately, will be more an act of faith than a practicing group, since the bees disappeared with the initial incident. Members of the guild stand

every day, facing east and west with binoculars, in hopes of spotting the returning bees on the horizon.

People like Betsey Wittick and Brian McWhorter will be greatly revered for their understanding of the land, and people like Akio Suyematsu and Dave Ullin, a liveaboard in the harbor, will be sought out for their expertise on repairing and using mechanical equipment. Your husband will rig an electrical generator to his bicycle and recharge small batteries. Although you won't see them much, since they live on another part of the island, you will hear that Linda and Stephen have become fabulously rich by selling meat and eggs. In exchange for what, you are not sure. The earth continues to tremble, and there are flashes visible across the water at night.

If you are a middle-aged writer with a bad back, you will begin to tell stories. Nothing too extravagant, nothing that will alarm people or give them false hope, but stories about the land. This land, this *terroir*, and maybe stories about the land your people came from. It had a different air, different soil, and different tastes. You will describe oranges, lemons, and limes. You will describe freshwater fish, and the chilequiles, wild greens that grew on the edge of the cultivated fields in Sonora. They had quail and rabbits, much like ours. You learned most of this out of books, just like the farmers on the island. Your library of printed books, almost lost in the transition to digital media, will be good as gold, and their stored knowledge will earn you a few meals.

If you are lucky, someone will bring you a little wine for your bad back. They will trade you a clam for ten potatoes, and offer to split some of the wood left when your neighbors cut down all the trees. A clam, a potato, dandelion greens and blackberry wine will be considered an excellent meal. It will rain, and you will get very cold. They will tell you to wash everything

carefully before eating it, but which is cleaner, the water from the ground, or the water from the sky? You will probably not die of high cholesterol.

One day, two or three people will show up in a boat. I can't see this part too clearly. If they have food with them, you will welcome them. If not, you will probably push them back into the water. But first, you might let them tell you a story or two about the rest of the wide world in the shimmering distance – what they grow, what they eat, and the tastes they miss the most.

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