

Laurel Rhodes
1361 words
Dubois HRS 190
10/ 07/ 08

1. Drawing closer to the conclusion of one family's adventure to obtain food sustainability in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, Barbara Kingsolver continues to taunt us with the imagery of an old mountain farm house encased in bountiful hillsides, a chicken coupe out back and a lush vegetable garden. Kingsolver has introduced us to the tribulations of an organic farmer. Those included in this section are the endless war with weeds, the seasonal surplus with lack of demand from the consumer and not to mention the competition with large-scale industrial farms that depend on machines and chemicals to do a farmer's work. Kingsolver is troubled but not discouraged and continues to enlighten us with her hope for the future consumers to acknowledge the fault with tasteless fruit and come to find a deep spiritual connection with the fuel to our bodies and soul.

After returning from their road trip, Kingsolver's family returns to their homestead to find their garden over run with pesky weeds. Organic farmers typically reuse excess plant and animal material left over from meals as a fertilizing process known as composting. Kingsolver claims that the result from this method should produce enough heat to fight off weeds (p. 174). Yet the popular alternative to weed pulling is the use of pesticides. ***"The substitute for chemical-intensive farming is thoughtful management of the ecosystem (p. 174)."*** Kingsolver records her experience and different methodology in a gardening journal and uses it as a reference to any problems she may have encountered in the past. When a rain shower clouds the day, like most, she spends

the afternoon doing paperwork and chores inside and comes to appreciate the labor of cultivating the land.

Kingsolver discusses the therapeutic benefits of working with her *“quieter, more manageable colleagues (p.177).”* The joy of caring for her plants is in itself an awarding experience, she oversees their health and they reciprocate with the oxygen of their thanks. Within these pages spirituality is found (like her friend who David meditates on Creation while cultivating). Answers to growing, life and death as described in the book is found through the ‘bioacoustics’, time to reflect, breathing fresh air and just moving at the pace of nature.

“It gets the body outside for some part of everyday to work the heart, lungs, and muscles you wouldn’t believe existed.... Instead of driving to the gym, we walk up the hill to do pitchfork free weights, weed-pull yoga, and Hoe Master. No excuses (p.177).”

In Mid July the garden was overflowing with bountiful fruits for harvest. Large bushels of produce lined the kitchen awaiting their fate as future meal. Kingsolver expresses the efficient process of organic food production by explaining that some work for money, she works for food and skips the middleman (p.176).

Americans consume more of the world’s resources than any other country. Kingsolver claims that every year it is the same during squash and tomato harvest. It is the only time of year that people in the church parking lot lock their car doors to escape being bombarded with garden surplus. Everyone has too much zucchini to know what to do with. Camille Kingsolver tells a funny anecdote of ‘tricking’ her little sister Lily’s friends into liking the abundant vegetable by baking it into cookies. Organic tomato farmers have a definite challenge in competing with large-scale industrial farmers. Not

only do the large-scale farms rely on chemicals and machines to get the job done, they also export their goods far and wide with tax-deductible gas.

“An estimated 67 million birds die each year from pesticide exposure on U.S. farms. Butterflies, too, are universally killed on contact in larval form by the genetically modified pollen contained in most U.S. corn (p.221).”

It is impossible to compete with the price offered by these corporations so when grocery stores make non legally bound promises to the organic farmers and then buy from the corporations, the surplus of un sold organic tomatoes goes to waste and the organic farmers, and their families, take the blow. In this section of AVM the author makes it clear the importance of inventive recipes and a guide to safe canning tips during this season of surplus. The tomatoes she cans and graciously uses them all year long and encourages others to support their farm marketers in the same spirit.

In succession to preserving the surplus the time had now come to execute a few chosen ‘mean’ roosters to close out the harvest season. We are offered stupendous humor on the story of Mr. Doodle and a turkey named sushi. The family makes a celebration of the sacrifice with close friends who had experienced a tragic loss in a drowning incident. The author clarifies the inaccuracy in the “running around like a chicken with its head cut off” rumor as well as putting the term “killing” into a cultural perspective. Here, factory farming is brought into consideration because most Americans don’t like to think about where their chicken nuggets and hamburger patties come from. She also makes the point that eating meat was a transformation of culture when we domesticated animals. To exemplify the cruelty of factory farming Kingsolver uses a quote from Pollan,

“More than any institution, the American industrial animal farm offers a nightmarish glimpse of what Capitalism can look like in the absence of moral or regulatory constraint (p.228).”

She goes on to call out the problems of industrialization and dehumanization of this feeding frenzy. Steven Hopp her husband and co-author enlightens us with an excerpt exposing these institutions for their reckless cruelty of making cows cannibals and neglecting not only the animals health but ours as well. Finally when things around the farm simmer down, Kingsolver and Hopp take off for a romantic get away to Italy.

Italian culture is centered on family style meals so it is no surprise that our author took great enjoyment in learning about the agriculture in this culturally rich country. The duo travel the Italian countryside exploring the various fattorias and produce stands. People here home make just about everything including their infamous pasta. Kingsolver doesn't let the language barrier stop her from finding out all she can wring out of the friendly Italian farmers. A wart filled pumpkin accompanies them for a majority of the trip until they acquire the means to extract its seeds and over the period of the trip, dry them out. Amazed by the connection of the people and their land, she offers an insight that it IS possible for humans to work the land without destroying it. I found this remark made by an acquaintance in response to Kingsolver's question on how they protect the grapes from the birds. ***“He answered, by protecting their predators (p. 255).”*** The trip was a success and highlight to the month of September, reading about October and smashing pumpkins will put a cap on a year of food life.

2. Kingsolver stands consistently on the opposing side of the nature of capitalism by claiming the negative effects from a farmer's perspective. It is evident that she does not

try to persuade people to change their lifestyles by making them guilty but instead by proposing an attractive solution. It is great that she has included her family in writing this book and gives multiple perspectives to the same situation. Steven Hopp is more of a journalist style in his writing and tends to be much like muckraking, he tends to expose issues with little restraint.

3. Kingsolver explores the disciplines of humanities by analyzing the surprising fact that no one really gives a hoot where the food they eat comes from. She takes essential historical facts about American agriculture and puts them in an easy to comprehend fashion. Her claim is that we are living unnaturally due to the evolution of our “need it now” culture. The slow food movement is probably not a lifestyle that all households could make time for, but a conscious consumer can make subtle differences in the way we treat our world. The book taunts readers to question how capitalism drives the food industry to be a maximum producer and waster.