

### Where's the Beef?

I have never had store bought beef, of course I have had some restaurant hamburgers which obviously didn't come from a small organic farm placed in a small town in Colorado but I have never gone to the store to buy beef. My family always tries to get our meat from people we know. For a majority of my life, I always kind of knew where my meat was coming from except for chicken. You don't see a whole lot of individuals that raise chickens for meat where I live. I hadn't thought that there was much of a difference between whether I got my meat from the store or whether it came from my own backyard until I was around the age of 11 and had a better understanding.

Ever since I was 10 years old my family has raised cattle. I remember the first cows that we ever got. I "owned" one and her name was Sky. To me, Sky was just another pet, the only difference was in size. But after two months of having her, the winter was too hard on her and she got sick and died. What I didn't really understand at the time was that these animals were not my pets. They were my food. After Sky passed away I came to the realization and I refused to contribute in these animals death. The worst part about it was when I had to help with branding. Ever since my family purchased cattle other family members would come over to help with the branding process.

For those of you that don't know what that means, the cows are poked and prodded until they are trapped in a silow and are burnt with a special "brand" to notify others, if the cow is lost, who the cow belongs to. During this time they are also injected with antibiotics to help make sure that they don't get sick and the male's testicles are removed as well. Seeing this at a young age made me scared of not only the cows who were freaking out but the humans who were doing this to the cows. I now realize that this process is "humane" compared to what most cows must go through, but that also isn't saying much. Nonetheless, the branding process is probably the worst part. Other than that the cows get to happily roam through grassy fields and eat, run and play as much as they want until it comes time for their lives to end.

My family doesn't really have a food ethic. We eat what we like and however much we want of it. Growing up I was raised with southern roots, which if you didn't already know, this means that I ate a lot of greasy foods and a lot of fattening foods. After my father remarried, which introduced me into the Hispanic culture at a young age. Which includes a lot of meats and starches as well as grease. My parents never really cared to try organic living because they thought that it was all made up and they still do. I grew up on processed foods as well. I have always been fairly tiny so I was always told that I could eat whatever I want and not gain weight. This made me think that it was okay to eat just about anything no matter what it may contain. As I grew older I realized that just because I have a high metabolism doesn't mean I can eat

whatever I want whenever I want. My parents always taught me two essentials in a real dinner, a source of protein, typically meat, and a vegetable. I never really grew up with food morals or ethics because I have never been taught any. I was practically raised on sweet tea, peaches, tortillas, green chilli, chicken, rice and potatoes. Not exactly an ideal diet. Not to say that I never ate normal healthy foods, but if you were to make a very long chart on all of the bad things I have consumed in my life, and how many good things I have consumed, the bad would definitely outway the good. The only thing I was truly taught to stay away from was coffee and sugary sweets.

In more recent days I have definitely been more cautious and aware of what I am consuming. I recently went on a field trip with some classmates of mine and there were a few options and I chose to go to Turtle Lake Refuge, a small organic farm in Durango, Colorado, and Sunnyside Meats, a nonindustrial butchershop. When arriving at Turtle Lake Refuge, I seemed to be filled with joy. The lady seemed very at peace and very spiritual. The entire place was one beautiful mess and it made me happy that it was right here in my own town. As soon as you arrive all you see is a mound of mud and compost, they have bathtubs in the greenhouses and when you look up and there is nothing but beautiful rocky cliffs and mountains. In the middle of all of this is a big pole wrapped in some type of cloth which to me looked like it probably had a spiritual meaning behind it. We were able to go into her greenhouse and pick just about anything up off the ground and eat it. We were also able to see her honeybees, which was my personal favorite. The sad part is that until a few days ago, I had no idea that anything like that even existed in my little town.

We then went to Sunnyside Meats. After not really eating anything all day and having little to no water that day, I was not prepared for what I was about to see. We started with just simply going to the bathroom and as soon as you walk in you see a skinned dead cow, hanging by its feet, being sawed in half. Soon after we walked through the same place the cows walk through on their way to being killed. I was able to pet a cow and then watched them taking the organs and skinning two other cows. Not long after walking in the terrible scented room the black cow that I had seen earlier was getting ready to be killed. We as individuals were given the choice to either watch them kill the cow or not. Most of us wanted to see what may have been a once in a lifetime opportunity. I decided to watch. My thought seemed to be similar to Michael Pollan's from the book we read, "The Omnivore's Dilemma", in which case I felt like if I were going to be taking part in eating this animal I should be able to give it enough respect to watch it die for me even if the cow wasn't specifically for for me.

Soon after watching the cow have a grand mal seizure right in front of me and seeing a cow head in a trash can with its eyes staring at me and my body couldn't take it. I seemed to either look disgusted, disturbed or depressed the whole time I was there. On the ride back to the school I ended up passing out because my body couldn't handle what all it was going through.

This experience and everything else I have experienced in the last 16 years of my life have all lead me to believe that nothing about what we put into our body is as simple as it seems. They say that ignorance is bliss and I guess that's what I felt up until I learned and understood more about where my meat comes from. You always hear the stories and you think you know what happens but the reality doesn't hit until you experience it for yourself. I have come to realise that I still have a lot of growing up to do. Some of that even involves evolving my food choices, which is something I didn't ever really think was necessary. My food ethic is somewhat yet to be determined but it still grows with every bite I take.