

Poem and Prose

Anonymous

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The following entries are a poem about the gift of eating a home cooked meal followed by a personal prose written as a brief walkthrough of my journey with food:

Soft smells sometimes rearrange realizations of days long lived

Such that one knows welcoming by the sweeping aromas relaxing tented shoulders

Crept so carefully the visitor is seated, placed a front tasty textures and coalescent
colors waiting to be devoured

Linger in the house made home as you lick and lap your plate clean

Do you know what this means?

You are loved and full, finish with gratitude, you are loved and full

Clung to beige walls tonight's fresh feast does not replace, instead layers atop last
nights eats

Compiled are the rememories lived and lived again

Conversations made more pleasant by meals savored therein

Food and breathing. When made to sit with the things we literally cannot live without, the aforementioned should come to mind, aside from water, what we eat and how we breathe are inextricably linked to our ability to live well and remain loyal to the pursuit of that which fulfills us. In my life, my relationship to food has been steadily transformed by my relationship to breath and as a more aligned awareness of both has grown, so have I. As a child it was not common to have home cooked family meals, save for an occasion on Sunday. The relationships of my home had been emotionally estranged for quite some time and that was naturally represented in our daily processes, the most profound in my opinion being how, when, and with whom we ate. I'd routinely find myself eating dinners in my room and as we grew further and further apart those "dinners" turned into mindless snacking until I'd fall asleep watching YouTube. Never did it occur to the members of the Baker household that our relationships to each other had affected our eating habits. Consequently, both the air in our home, and the air in our lungs remained stale until we finally parted ways. Looking back, I have been lucky to reflect on a life harshly lived. It seems a perpetual breath holding sensation swooned my youth, always tense, always tip-toeing around myself and others, but I was not alone. My mother has said that she thought everything would collapse if she took a breath, a sentiment which I share. Similarly, being from the South, it was almost discouraged to eat "healthy" or to practice anything related to "mindfulness," while the former

at times seemed an unnecessary choice, the latter remained blasphemous and irrational. Still, such an experience provides a certainty for what I now know to be an authentic realization of how much better one could live. Eventually, having spent a year or so in university it became prominent both the lack of third space and lack of consistent good food present on campus so, as the semester went on, a few friends and I found ourselves hosting potluck gatherings in effort to mitigate both issues. It went well for a while but eventually that same tense breath found its way to me again. Rather than focusing on the food and people in front of me, I again found myself holding my breath, anxious to create what I wanted to be the perfect event. Having not yet known the importance of breathing and being present with my breath the tension quietly grew to controlling obsession eventually fostering an environment much more dissonant to the one I initially set out to create. It became a chore to enjoy or even participate in the aforementioned, a slog only made endurable by intense disassociation from the present moment. Such a disassociation found itself, unfortunately, to be a useful coping mechanism that webbed its way throughout other areas of life, and for a while I remained oblivious to both the problem and the solution. As time went on, it became clear the magnitude of the cope as a sleepy and dangerous depression calcified over me causing an undeniable spiritual and emotional death. Needing to take a step back from hosting and regular life in general, I found myself in attendance at a 10 day silent meditative course. The primary focus therein became an ardent observation of the breath, where speaking or acknowledgement of other students was prohibited. Up to 10 hours a day my only objective was present breathing, a frustrating endeavor that made a confrontation of my dissociative habits all the

more necessary. While in the course, our meditative efforts were supplemented by a rigorous and fulfilling vegetarian diet, every meal being intentionally and consciously prepared by volunteers who were also engaged in attentive breath watching. Upon my re-integration into mainstream society problems of the past did not go away but, as per the meditation, a new perspective was taken. It was never the externalities of my life that were the issue, it was always my method of dealing with them that made every day just another event to get through. In subconscious efforts to combine both eating well and breathing well, cooking has once again become a chance to make myself an active participant in the present moment of my life. I find myself most calm and most reassured when in the kitchen preparing a wholesome meal for my consumption. Often, when I sense myself rushing through said preparation, it suits me to take a breath and relax any tension that might be arising, conscious again of the present processes that make for a more fruitfully lived day.