

Geneva Ebisu

2010 Silicon Valley Reads Essay Contest

He stretches to the tips of his worn sneakers to peek through the lace curtains, his hunger a persistent companion. *There* is the source of the sweet, mouth-watering aroma wafting out to the street. He spies a family gathered around the table, the dad serving...ooh, a golden, baked pie...apple? peach? How cruel! His small head fills with longing as he is overcome by the mesmerizing sensations....

He groans, rolls over quickly, slapping his wife with his arm. Arousing himself with disgust, he stumbles into the kitchen. Coffee, nine-grain toast, the thinnest sheen of butter; bacon and eggs a distant memory. His 16-year-old beanpole of a son tromps in with a handful of Oreos, stuffing them in his mouth as he downs a full glass of creamy, ice-cold milk. He glowers, and his son gives him a “What?” look. Yea, he thinks, I was like you once, but you’ll see. Pound by pound, year by year, it creeps up on you until one day you run into an attractive, former colleague and you feel her eyes scanning your waistline like an aerial photographer with a wide-angle lens. And, there’s your doctor pointing out that your cholesterol level is rising faster than the Dow.

His wife waltzes in and he feels her tractor beam eyes zero in on his plate. Yes, that’s all I’m having he telegraphs, with some resentment. *She* goes on a health kick, drops 20 pounds, and now proselytizes about the glories of nutritious eating to everyone who oohs and aaahs over her newfound svelteness. The “Oprah of Nutrition” - except, even Oprah...ha! proves my point, he thinks ruefully.

Eat this! Buy that! Yum, yum. Don't eat that! It's full of trans fat, artery-hardening gunk, high-fructose corn syrup. It'll kill you! We're bigger than ever, but wasn't that the goal of the primal cave dwellers? Except, few of them probably had the luxury of becoming obese. We've gone from desperation hunting and gathering to becoming the "victims" of our overly successful industrial food system. Mass market food is too convenient, too tempting. Then, when we give in, we are damned by the scientists and the nutritionists. As Michael Pollan observes in *In Defense of Food*, it results in "a steadily diminishing ability to enjoy one of the great pleasures of life without guilt or remorse." Once, we were excoriated for the temptations of the flesh; now we are denounced for indulging in the extra-crispy-skinned.

Meat for protein - and cholesterol? or carbs for energy - and diabetes? Milk for the kids? or growth hormones for early puberty? (good grief!) Drink wine? or stop! Coffee bad? or cancer-preventative? Vegetables and fruits with a side of pesticides? or strictly organic and costly? Are we actually going to live longer, or will it just seem longer - like prisoners, prisoners of deprivation? Who really knows. There's an expert for every point of view. Pollan's right - so much befuddlement and anxiety about eating. Sigh.

Have some pie? Alright, an orange. Feel better already.